THE OFFICE

BY

NATHAN ASCH

Ethel Mae Cochran

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THE OFFICE

By

NATHAN ASCH

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To

Sidney and Theresa Prince

OCT 13 1920

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. . . and then one day the office failed . . .

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THE OFFICE

I

Wall Street

New York — downtown — streets — buildings — firms

streets — short — crooked — narrow — dark

are crowded — teeming — undulating — festering

passers-by — strollers — walkers — loiterers — crowds — mobs — members of the Big Board — members of the Curb — sleek-haired salesmen — girl graduates from Mount Holyoke — girl graduates from the Manhattan Preparatory School on Houston Street — telephone clerks — runners, very old or very young — bucket-shop keepers — boy wonders — newsboys — newswomen — beggars — best traders on the Street — never-get-nowhere fellows — insurance salesmen — tipsters — touch-system typists — detectives — men — women — boys — girls — American — Dutch — Irish — Jew — Italian — Russian — French — German — Span-

ish — Polish — Argentine — Swedish — nigger — English — Turk — Mexican — Syrian — American — wop — greaser — Polack — sheenie — coon — mick — kike — chink — Yid — frog — limie

extra — chocolate almonds — pineapple — dates — figs — hats — lunch on the tombs of the Trinity Churchyard — cigars — cigarettes — chewing gum — cigarette butts from the sidewalk

best architects — most famous engineers — most skillful draughtsmen — best paid artists — greatest builders — decorators — mechanics — carpenters — plumbers — masons — hod carriers

conceived — planned — consulted — drafted — erected — executed — constructed — decorated — furnished

tallest — largest — greatest — biggest — strongest — everlasting — most massive — most economical — space-saving — most artistic — magnificent — grandiose — superb — marvelous — unique

rock — steel — granite — marble — wood — glass — copper — brass — lead — paint

National City Bank — National City Company — National Park Bank — National Bank of Commerce — First National Bank — Guaranty Trust Company — Equitable Trust Company — Bankers Trust Company — J. P. Morgan & Company — Kuhn, Loeb & Company — Lazard Frères et Cie. — Kidder, Peabody & Company

safe — solid — conservative — solid bedrock — unlimited resources — high-grade — gilt-edged — respectability — we do not guarantee this statement, but we have taken it from sources we believe reliable — my country, may she ever be in the right, but my country right or wrong — patriotism — rock of Gibraltar — absolutely safe — A-1 — AAAaaa — 24-carat — Mayflower — New England tradition — bulldog — gr-r-r-r

men — women — boys — girls — husbands — fathers — grandfathers — daughters — granddaughters — wives — sons — sisters — friends — foes — nodding acquaintances — hat-lifting acquaintances — hand-shaking acquaintances — good fellows — bad sports — nice chaps — damned fools — she's easy to get — wise guys — know-it-all fellows — boy wonders — never-missed-a-shot fellows

— clever financiers — suckers — fish — poor fish (nevergetnowherebecauseheneverlookswherehe'sgoingfellows)

buy — sell — exchange — beg — borrow — steal — cheat — give — take — donate — endow — deceive — lie — sympathize — pity — love

melting pot — maelstrom — mix-up — bedlam — pandemonium

II

The Voice of the Office

good morning Mister Zuckor—
good morning——

good morning Mister Zuckor—
good morning——

hello Jacobs—
hello—got a *Times*—
yes here 'tis——

good morning Mister Zuckor—
good morning—

and at the fourth hole there's a hazard some hazard I tell you the par for that hole is good morning Zuckor five and what do you think I did it in

hello Michelet what did you do last night
oh nothing was with a Jane
anything happen

what do you think
good morning Mister Zuckor
good morning
hello Kranz
good morning Mister Read

diling-dling-ling-ing-ng-ng-g

hello yes sir what's that yes sir buy twenty-four Empire Gas at the market I will sir yes sir as soon as the market opens right

good morning Mister Zuckor

and I made it in eighty-seven and the par for that course is hey Jacobs don't forget that order in Steel

no sir

zim-m-m-m-m-m

hello yes sir no the market has not opened yet sir right I'll call you Kranz call the Broadway National at the opening

couldn't do a thing with her she said no no I don't do it what would you do with her

good morning Mister Zuckor

you'll have to come down earlier than this we can't have you people coming at every hour

zing-ing-ing-ng-g-g

finest rum in the country hello yes sir oh hello Doran what you couldn't sell it I'm sorry old boy yes I'll do anything I can right Michelet get the opening on Standard Steel for Doran Squibs

yes Mister Read I guess I'll drop her there's nothing doing

hey Glymmer I see where Federal Tel went up to par I guess we can let go a few Jacobs get the market on Federal Tel

dung-g

market open open Steel nine and three-quarters Blue Hill unchanged

buy one hundred Steel at nine and a half

right buy a hundred Steel at nine and a half right Cotton Goods six and an eighth Atlantic Power a quarter hello right

tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik

Mister Read quick Steel nine and a quarter

right hello get MacLane quick hello hello hello Mac Steel nine and a quarter want to buy some

Steel nine and three-eighths
it went to three-eighths think it's going higher
want to buy a hundred right
nothing doing Michelet

one hundred Southern States offered at sixty-six Oklahoma Power sold at eight

tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik

American Tire seventy-eight American Tire sold at eight and a quarter American Tire eight and an eighth Mister Read American Tire sold at three-eighths
it'll go lower

tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik

hello get me Rolland hello hello is that you cutie I want to speak to Mister Rolland busy all right I'll

wait how's your heart is that so coming out with me no I'll be nice you don't know how nice I can be hello Mister Rolland Sugar six yes sir right buy one hundred at six

buy one hundred Sugar at six

tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik

zig-g-g-g-g-g-g

that's Baltimore hello yes sir yes could you repeat it please yes sir forty French eights at six thank you sir Mister Read Baltimore wants forty French eights at six

what's the market

market on French eights

well I'll bet twenty-five on the Giants

go on I don't want your money

bing

hello French eights five to three-quarters

hello get me Bryant hey Jacobs got a match thanks is that you Jim want to sell some French eights yap what's your price I'll buy some at an eighth

make it lower all right bought forty French eights at ninety-five and a half thank you

hello get me Baltimore right hello bought forty French eights at five and a half yes sir good price isn't it thank you sir

tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik

money five per cent
money five per cent
Kranz tell Mister Zuckor
yes sir

check for Doran
wait a minute
comparisons
God damn you shut up
check for Doran
right six four three seven point two four five seven two o o point six two
check for Doran
call money five per cent
call money five per cent right
I met a little kid last night a pippin some dancer too
do anything
check for Doran
hey if you can't shut up I'll shut you up

eight five seven point o nine seven four eight three six point o o

took her to the movies and mushed up some kid I tell you

I suppose that's all you ever do mush

check for Doran

tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik

hello yes sir

Jacobs if I'm wanted I'm over at the club

yes Mister Read

got a cigarette

Steel nine Atlantic Power a quarter market's weaker

hello sell one hundred at par and a quarter yes sir thank you

sell one hundred U. S. Locomotives at par and a quarter right

I asked Goodman to let me have twenty in advance and he stared at me with his limp what the louse hello sold one hundred U. S. Locomotives at par and three-eighths

hello sold one hundred U. S. Locomotives at par and three-eighths thank you sir right

tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik

I think I'll go to the ball game

all right I want to go tomorrow

Kranz lend out fifty thousand

right hello lend fifty thousand right

think I'll lend six cents

go on you haven't got six cents

Steel nine to an eighth Shoe twenty-three and a quarter

I'd like to take some of that

don't touch it it's fireworks

dlang-lang-ng-ng-ng

hello yes hello cutie how's your liver hello Mister Rolland no sir I'm sorry but we couldn't buy your Sugar the markets stronger yes sir to a quarter your offer right

buy one hundred Sugar at six and three eighths cancel a quarter

buy one hundred Sugar at six and three-eighths cancel a quarter right

tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik
anything for me
no Mister Read we filled that order in Steel
fine did you call him up
yes sir

buy one hundred at ninety-four
dung-g
one moment sir they are announcing something
Richard Livingstone suspended from the Exchange

Richard Livingstone suspended from the Exchange yes sir ha ha I guess the money's in his wife's name yes sir

tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik

five to three hello yes sir all right I'll cancel it
cancel one hundred Hudson Valley at sixty
he must have got cold feet
all right I'll bet twenty-five four to five
bet
tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik

hello yes hello hello Rabinowitz no I didn't buy it sorry way off the market yes I'll let you know right

dling-ling-ing-ng-ng

yes sir Read talking no sir I'll try to get it sir Michelet quick market on Blue Island

dung-g

market closed

I am very sorry the market is closed I'll call you up the first thing in the morning yes sir good day sir get me a glass of water

yes sir

hello Steel closed at nine Cotton Goods five and seven-eighths Atlantic Power a quarter right sport

I'll tell you what I'll do I'll ask her to get a friend and we can go up to her place she's got some fine booze

hello get me a wire hello Dresden four eight four hello can I speak to Miss Connor hello hello little bright eyes who is this I'll let you guess no it's not no you got to guess that's right how did you do it how's your heart

Mex fours five to a quarter Mexican Irrigation thirty-two to six Mex large five to fifty

if you'll get a friend I'll get a friend of mine down yes he's a fine fellow I'm bringing him down ain't I now don't get sore all right we'll be down at eight get plenty of liquor yes I'll lend you some all right by-by she's some kid

Dutch sixty-twos four and a quarter three quarters forty sevens an eighth to five-eighths—

well I guess I'll beat it I've got a date—

good night Mister Zuckor—
good night—

good night Mister Read—
good night Kranz how are they coming—
fine Mister Read
that's good—

what are you doing tonight Jacobs—
out with a broad—
good night Mister Zuckor—
don't forget that Blue Island tomorrow—
no sir good night—
good night Mister Zuckor—
good night—
good night Mister Zuckor—
good night—

III

The Office

The office is on a certain floor of a tall building downtown.

The office consists of three rooms: one large, one small, and a third cut into smaller cubicles.

The office has furniture: desks, tables, soft chairs, hard chairs, telephones, tickers, typewriters, ledgers, files, a blackboard, steel engravings in frames, a telephone switchboard, a financial library in a glass front case, spittoons, doormats.

The office is cleaned from midnight until four o'clock by old charwomen from West Street.

The office is opened by Mr. Zuckor.

The office is filled with people: senior partner, trading partner, floor partner, junior partner, traders,

telephone clerks, salesmen, bookkeepers, comparison clerks, messenger boys, guards, porters.

The office is filled with customers, who buy and sell securities which are the blood of the nation's life.

The office is filled with noise, confusion, rallies, panics, downward movements, upward movements, stiffenings, weakenings, voices, shouts, cries, laughs.

The office is the scene of some men's successes and other men's failures.

The office is the central point of the nation's business.

The office is the most important point in the nation.

The office is the most feared point in the nation.

The office gives its employees a living; they work in it and in return they receive pay, for which they buy food, clothing, shelter, amusements, pay the doctor, the undertaker, pay taxes.

The office is responsible for its employees' existence.

The office occupies the larger part of its employees' waking hours.

The office occupies all of its employees' attention.

The office is the scene of all of its employees' ambitions.

The office is the scene of all of its employees' hopes.

The office is the most important thing these people think about.

The office is the reason of these people's existence.

The office can stop, and these people will die.

. . . and then one day the office failed . . .

1

Gertrude Donovan

A sound of cutting reached her ears. She halted and listened. So they were ripping the ticker out as Charlie said they would. Then it was all over. She didn't believe it yet. Failed. Bankrupt. She didn't understand it. What did it mean? Then she remembered what Charlie had further said: a new job. And she saw a picture of herself going downtown to the employment office early in the morning; filling out a blank; being told that she would be notified if an opening could be found. Then waiting; every morning waiting for the postman and finding that there was nothing for her. Then the call at the office. The manager would first look at her legs, then at her neck. He would measure her with his eyes. The old look. She tried to picture the new boss. Fat? Thin? Good-looking? Will he try to get fresh? She'd put him in his place.

She became angry. They had no business hiring

her if they were going to fail. She wasn't working for love. It's no fun to be looking for a new job every day. Just as you get started, and the clerks stop looking at you as if you were lying naked, you've got to give it all up and start all over again.

Her hands began automatically to hit the keys. And the Hudson seal: she'd have to forget that, for this year. Mother would never let her off on the board. She'd start crying about the high prices, and the raise in rent, and a million and one other things. Then she'd look at her as if she were murdering her. No coat and no permanent wave next month.

Her hand momentarily stopped typing, and touched her hair; then opening a drawer in her desk, she took out a patent leather bag, from which she extracted a small mirror and examined her hair. It was getting loose. They charged you twenty dollars, and it didn't last more than a month.

She took out her powder puff and powdered herself, twisting her lower lip over the upper and blowing at her nose.

A pink light shone out of the call box, and taking a pad and a pencil, she walked out of her cubicle.

With Mr. Glymmer in the room were Mr. Read

and Harry Widener. They did not notice her entrance, but kept on talking with gravity. She sat down in the soft chair that she always took, crossed her legs, and did not adjust her skirt as she always did when the junior partner was not there; and waited. Her hand went once again to her hair, lifting it near the temples.

He was nice. Much nicer than Jim Denby. He always looked at you nice, and his dark eyes looked into yours something personal. He was a man. And he didn't look as if he played servant girl to any woman, like Jim did. It was nice; it was equal, it was.

She caught a few words. Protective Committee and Supreme Court. Read was as usual very cool; he sat on the edge of the desk, and his fingers played with a cigarette holder. Glymmer seemed more nervous. She didn't like him. Too anxious to please always. Not her or the other clerks, but the customers, or his partners. She didn't like his smile. She never had liked it. She wouldn't trust any man with a smile like that.

She looked again at Harry Widener. He seemed amused at the whole affair. He hardly said a word, just looked at them, the corners of his mouth curled

up. Then he looked at her, and she stiffened up. But his gaze immediately dissolved.

Then Mr. Glymmer began to dictate. She copied his words, with concentration as always, forgetting everything else, even ignoring the meaning of what she wrote. When he had finished, she rose and prepared to leave. But she stopped and asked:

"Mr. Glymmer, will the office be open tomorrow?"

"Mr. Zuckor, when he returns, will have an announcement to make."

She became angry again, considered whether she should bang the door, became frightened, and then resolved that since she was losing her position she might as well bang it. So she did, and walked into the general office.

"Well, cutie," said Charlie when he saw her, "it's up."

"Do we work tomorrow?" she asked.

"Not a chance. Better take a typewriter home with you. It'll be your pay." The other clerks laughed.

"If I don't get my pay," she said, "I'll have Mr. Glymmer arrested."

"Harry Widener, too?" asked Charlie.

She stiffened up and said:

"Mind your business." And walked back to her desk.

She began to copy the letter Mr. Glymmer had dictated to her. In typing it was different than in shorthand taking: she could think as much as she wanted to; the eyes communicated to the fingers unconsciously.

Harry Widener arrested. Harry Widener arrested. Arrested. Arrested.

I know one thing she said nearly aloud. If Harry Widener asked me, I wouldn't care if he were married a million times; I'd go with him. She became frightened, and looked around to see if anybody were listening. Then she said in a high voice:

"I would."

The telephone bell rang. Still repeating I would she answered it. A familiar heavy voice came from the other end.

"That you, Gerty?"

Jim. Oh, bother. What did he want?

"Just heard the news," he said. "What are you going to do?"

She kept silent. In her mind she was comparing

Harry Widener with Jim Denby. He's got better eyes and a better figure; and he's nicer. He's—he's lots nicer.

"Gerty," she heard.

"What?"

"I'm coming around tonight. I've got something to tell you."

She wished he wouldn't. She didn't want him around that night. And his hair was nicer. Straight and nice, not all curled up. And she'd bet he didn't look so foolish when he kissed somebody.

"I'm tired, Jim," she said.

And she thought, I'd bet if *he* were asking me to see him tonight, he wouldn't ask like that; he'd say something.

"It's all right, Gert. I won't stay long."

She hung up. What did he want from her? He would come around tonight, pestering. Would she marry him? He had two thousand saved up. Live in the Bronx. Two rooms and a kitchen. Toilet on the floor. Bath in the washbowl. Not she.

Then Miss James, the telephone girl, came in. They began talking. Miss James told Gerty where she might look for a job.

"He told me yesterday," she said. "Theatrical

office. Twenty-two a week, and you don't get killed like here on the Street."

Theatrical office. Maybe she'd get a chance to go on the stage. She'd been quite good at it in school. And then Jim had taken her a few times to the theater. It was easy. All you needed was pull.

And then, maybe Harry Widener. If she'd be an actress, it would be all right. Actresses can do those things. Why, you read about them in the papers.

"I don't know," she said to Miss James. "A girl is taking an awful chance going to one of those theatrical offices. Why, the manager would want you to do all kinds of things for the job."

"What's the difference?" said Miss James. "Twenty-two a week. Me for money. If I could take shorthand . . ."

The afternoon slowly wore on. At four Zuckor came into her office and dictated to her an announcement that, owing to the liquidation of the firm's assets, the office would be closed. Gertrude copied what he said without hearing it. The office had stopped interesting her. She was leaving, and it already represented a forgotten past. And she would have completely ignored this fact of bankruptcy if not that it represented a parting from Harry Wid-

ener. In the few months that she had been with Glymmer, Read the junior partner had become a part of her. True she knew that, while in the office, there was a gulf that divided them, a gulf that was insurmountable: the difference between employer and employee. Each one had his or her rights, which were not to be disregarded. And although at times she almost wished that the junior partner would tear that difference away, something within herself said that if he did he would not be Harry Widener and she would cease being Gerty Donovan. She knew that although physically they would come nearer, there would be a complete divorce of their spirits. And she knew that now their spirits were near, that he noticed her, that when she passed he looked at her with eyes puzzled, and that whenever their eyes met, for however a fleeting moment, a union had been accomplished. And she had been satisfied, even gratified, by this fleeting communion.

He had been her criterion. She had used him as a standard by which she measured all her acquaintances. She had never been dissatisfied with Jim Denby. She had known him for a long time, for so long that the beginning of their acquaintance was completely forgotten. She had taken for granted

that some day she would marry him, she had been encouraged in this thought by her mother, by all who knew her. She had to get her man.

But when she had seen Harry Widener, she became doubtful. Intuitively she knew that he was a higher type of man than her accepted future husband. And although she could not define his finesse, nor possibly even locate it, she knew it existed. And she noticed that in all comparisons Jim failed and Widener triumphed.

And possibly she would have been satisfied with Jim if she could continue to see the other. Even to be near him. She somehow felt cleaner, more refined, in a higher world with the junior partner. She saw him rarely. He did not come into the office often, but stayed at his club from where he sent in any new business he had secured. But sometimes he did come, and she knew he would, and it was enough. He was a rare drug that she needed but seldom, but without which she felt she could not live.

And now it was over. Harry Widener was no more. She was to go home and stay with Jim Denby. She was made for such as he. For men with warm, moist palms, and warm, moist faces,

and warm, moist looks. For men who do not take but beg. For sixty dollars a week, and a bookkeeper's household, and a bookkeeper's children, and a bookkeeper's life. Oh, hell!

Absent-mindedly she cleaned her typewriter, and was ready to place the cover, and then she remembered that it didn't matter, and left it where it always lay during the day, under her desk. Then she turned to the wall where her cloak and hat were hung. No, she should go into the general office and say good-by. She didn't want to. But she might yet see Harry Widener. So she went in.

She was surprised to see the office as it had always been. It was not at all changed. You might come in tomorrow and begin to work again. Possibly it was all a lie. Or a joke. There was no failure. It would go on as before. And she would continue to see Harry Widener. Harry Widener. Harry Widener. Harry Widener, something shouted into her ear.

She saw him halfway across the general office. He was sitting on a desk reading an evening paper and smoking. The blue smoke twined itself about his manicured finger nails.

Run over to him now and . . . and what? Why,

kiss him, of course, and tell him you want him, that he can do anything he wants to with you. He can walk over you, and spit on you. But quick, or it'll be too late. Hurry. Hurry. He's looking up. He's looking.

"I guess it's all over, Miss Donovan," he said, with a smile.

"Yes, Mr. Widener," she answered.

"Too bad," he said, and returned to his paper.

Her knees weak, she passed him. It was too late. It was too late. Too late. What shall she do?

There was a little group near Mr. Zuckor's desk. He was paying off. He seemed very pale and very tired. He called to her.

"Miss Donovan, here's your pay."

She came over. Took it. Signed the receipt. Too late.

She rode home with her mind a blank. She did not even read the paper which she had automatically bought with her ticket. Somebody gave her his seat, and she did not thank him, but absent-mindedly sat down, drew on her gloves, and sat. People jostled over her, pressed her knees, stepped on her pumps,

but she ignored this. There was nothing she could do. Everything was over. And she was not given to brooding.

Then she came out of the train, walked to the street, and turned the corner grocery toward her home. This was her neighborhood, where she had been born, brought up. Here was the motion picture house, "The Lakewood," where, when a little girl, she used to wait outside for some one to take her in, children not being admitted without companions. Later, when she had entered high school, she used to come here every night, and in a corner, far away from even the dull light, she would sit with a neighborhood boy and mush: kiss, and soul kiss, and hold, and he would try to touch her not yet full-grown breasts, and she would refuse and then unwillingly consent. There had been many couples in the corner, and they would all sit there, ignoring the picture; just sit in the dark and press one against the other.

And here was the ice-cream parlor, "Gunn's," with its inviting display of sweets, and the little room in the back, with tables. After the movies she used to come here with her friends, and they would gorge themselves with the ice cream, ordering the most

fancy concoctions until their mouths would become like acid, from too many sweets.

Then she passed the "dark corner" of Harrigan's, the hardware man's. Here was the least light in the neighborhood. And into here, after the movies and the ice cream, her companion would pull her, and here they would stand in the shadow of the two glass cases, holding one another in their arms, and they would seek something which they did not understand, and did not know where to find it, until she, frightened at the lateness of the hour, would tear herself away and run home.

And finally just before her home, she passed the Borough News printing works, above which was housed the Lakewood Business College, which she had entered after her two years in high school. Here was where she had learned stenography, and typing, and the little bookkeeping she knew. Nearly all her friends had entered this school, which was their stepping-stone into the business world.

Mother was in the kitchen, and as she took off her coat Gerty wondered when would be the best time to break the news to her. Before dinner or after dinner? It would be better to get it over with be-

fore, but then again, dinner would be spoiled; there might even be no dinner at all. Gerty had no appetite, but she reflected that anything, even eating, was better than listening to her mother's lamenting. So she decided to wait.

She walked into the dining room, took the doily off the table, went to the sideboard, and took out the napkin. Automatically she began to set the table.

Mother appeared, fat, satisfied, white aproned.

"That you, Gerty? Jim was here awhile ago. Said he's coming after dinner."

Gerty said nothing. She placed on the table the salt cellar, the knives and forks, the only really good things they had in the house. Came from the family. Solid silver.

"Would you believe it," continued her mother, "butter's sixty cents a pound. And eggs a dollar a dozen. I gave Strinelli a piece of my mind. Mrs. Brown told me he's got no end of eggs in his cellar, and he's keeping them for higher prices. I said to him: It would be a good thing if they threw you foreigners out. Trying to live on us poor people. A dollar a dozen for eggs. The idea!"

Gerty kept on setting. Even after she had finished placing on the table everything that apparently was

necessary, she continued. She adjusted the position of the cutlery. Brought water, something very rare. Dusted off the top of the sideboard. Anything better than talking. An idea was being born in her mind, and her mother was preventing her from developing it.

Harry Widener would be with another firm, of that she was sure. Why not try to get a job there? She would ask him to recommend her. He couldn't refuse her. She had been a good stenographer. Never late. No nonsense in the office. No peekaboo waists or transparent skirts. She didn't chew gum or anything. Why shouldn't she be able to get a job there? And then she would be with him.

Her mother fixed her nearsighted eyes on Gerty, followed her movements, and went on talking.

"Mrs. Denby's awfully low. They expect her to go any day. The doctor said it was cancer of the stomach. Incurable, he said. Lying in St. Mark's. Private room. A day nurse. A night nurse. It must be awful for Jim to pay all that. He's nice to come down to see us, and his mother almost dead."

Gerty understood her mother's weak tactics. At other times it amused her to hear the older woman talking, praising Jim. But now it only served to

irritate her. It was none of mother's business whom she was going to marry. She was free. Earning her own living. She could do as she pleased. She could even go to live by herself if she wanted to. She'd save money anyway. And time. With the subway, she was wasting two hours every day traveling. And if she went out in the evening it was two more hours lost. If this kept up, she'd do it. She wasn't going to listen to anybody's talking. She was a free and equal human being, she was.

"I'm hungry," she announced.

Dinner proceeded more or less quietly. The few attempts of the mother at conversation were promptly squelched by her daughter's silence. Only toward the end did Mrs. Donovan begin her attacks again.

"Jim told me while he was here, he's getting a raise at the end of the month. Three hundred a month, and assistant teller. He might even get to be assistant cashier some day. One hundred dollars a week and a private room. He's a good boy, Jim is."

"If you're going to keep on like this," said Gerty silently to her mother, "I won't tell you about the failure."

"And he's got a flat at One Hundred and Fortieth Street. Two rooms and a kitchen. The landlord will paper the walls any way you'll want him to. Yes, and a bathtub, too. In the kitchen."

A few moments before Harry Widener had been far away, almost imperceptible. Now he came quite near, and looked at Gerty with his nice black eyes, and said: You're going to be an actress on One Hundred and Fortieth Street with two rooms and a kitchen. Bathtub in the kitchen. And you're going to take dictation on the walls he'll decorate for you because you don't chew gum.

She was going crazy. If she wasn't, her mother was making her. And she looked at her mother and with her eyes said: "I want Harry Widener, and I don't care who knows it. You or Jim Denby or anybody else. I don't give a good God damn who knows it." Like that.

And aloud she said:

"I am going to my room."

"Better get ready for Jim," her mother said. "Put on the mauve waist."

As she shut the door of her room Gerty reflected that she had not told her mother of the loss of her position. She didn't care. Let her mother worry

later. With those dirty tricks. Trying to talk her into marrying Jim. She wouldn't have him if he were the last man on earth. Not if he had all of the world's gold. And all the diamonds. Not with a face like that. He'd have to have it made over again.

She sat down on her bed, adjusted her hair, and said:

"If he'll begin pestering me, I'll send him to hell, I will."

Charity. Trying to give her something. Protecting her from the terrible woild. She didn't want protecting. She wanted to be left alone. People shouldn't interfere into what she did. It was all their fault, anyway. If they wouldn't have interfered, she . . .

"Shut up," she said to herself, and began unbuttoning her waist.

"Mauve waist," she said. "I'll give him mauve waist. If he'd be a man, he wouldn't come around me. He'd stop bothering me. Can't he see I don't want him and his protecting?"

She walked toward the closet, opened the door, and took off the hook the mauve waist. Absentmindedly she placed her arms through the sleeves

and buttoned it. Then she sat on the chair before the mirror and began to powder herself.

She remembered that once, about two months before, a woman friend of Harry Widener had come into the office toward the end of an afternoon and had waited for him. A woman of his kind, with hair that received the attention of a friseur, face that was massaged, and hands that were manicured every day. She had worn a dark tailor-made suit and a mauve waist with a lace collar cut so low that the upper parts of her white breasts could be seen in the opening. She was stunning. Gerty had admitted that to herself. This was class. And when Harry Widener had come in, she had held out her hand to him, a black, kid-gloved hand, in a manner that Gerty knew she could never have imitated. The hand had gone right out, accompanied by a smile, in which the teeth were shown, even teeth, and dazzling white. And one Saturday afternoon, walking up Fifth Avenue, Gerty had seen a waist like that: mauve, with a white lace collar, cut very low. She had bought it, although the price had been exorbitant and a large part of her salary had been spent in the purchase. She had never dared to wear it in the office, it was cut so low, and she had

been afraid that Widener would notice the resemblance. And even in the house she wore it only on rare moments. When she wanted to feel equal to him, to do something that she should want him to see her do, she dressed in the mauve waist.

Noticing that the ribbon of her chemise showed in the cut, she untied it and tucked it into her bosom. Her neck now looked similar to the neck of the woman in the office. A white triangle deep into her bosom, with the curve of a breast showing on each side. Her breasts were just as round as the other's and just as white. It would be better to show a little more. She tucked aside the collar, and the curve became more pronounced. She sat at the mirror examining her face, fixing her hair. If he were to see her now, he would not be able to resist her. He would look at her with his black eyes, his brows would contract a little, and his nostrils puff out. And his arms would stretch out toward her, would envelop her, and she would lie in them quiet, unafraid.

She closed her eyes, and through the shimmering darkness of her lids she saw Harry Widener. He was looking at her, and she was looking at him. He

was saying to her: "You are with me now and you are quiet." And she answered to him, "Yes, I am quiet." And they sat there in the darkness, she feeling his odor, and lulled to sleep by it.

She felt a draught of wind, heard the noise of a door opening, and saw Harry Widener tumble into the light. She opened her eyes. Her mother was standing in the doorway.

Mrs. Donovan was talking, but Gerty did not hear what she said. She could not orientate herself. She did not recognize her surroundings, nor the fat woman before her. This was strange to her. She had no place in the room where she was. She belonged somewhere else: in dazzling, flickering sunlight with Harry Widener. And peace.

"You're a nice one," her mother was saying. "It's got to be a stranger that gives me the news about my own child. Why didn't you tell me you were out of a job?"

Gerty did not answer. She heard somebody talking, felt she was being reproved, but it did not move her. She had been with him a moment before, and she still felt his presence.

Then she heard her mother say:

"Jim's in the front room. Better go out to him. And you'd better be nice to him. You won't find a better man."

Her mother was talking, but Gerty did not understand her words. But she felt that she was commanded to go, so she stood up and walked toward the front room. Her mother, not understanding, placed herself out of her way, and let her pass.

She came into the front room, and looked at the figure sitting on the sofa, a figure that rose when she entered, and came toward her. She answered his hello, sat down on the sofa in the spot he had sat in. Felt him sitting down beside her, noticed her mother had not come in with her, and sat.

She tried to gather her thoughts together. Who was it who was sitting beside her on the sofa? It was Jim Denby. No, it was Harry Widener. It was Harry Widener with eyes that were not so nice, and with a face that tried to be as expressionless as it could. But no, it could not have been Harry Widener. Harry Widener looked at you personal like, and decent. And Jim Denby didn't. He looked at you as if he wanted to eat you up. He was in love with you. And Harry wasn't. Why?

Further her mind refused to travel. A black

cloud came into her brain and forbade all thought. And she surrendered to the cloud and sat motionless and thoughtless.

Then she heard Jim or Harry talking. He was asking her what she would do. And she did not know how to answer. Because she knew she had to give two different answers. If this were Jim, she'd have to tell him she would look for another job and if this were Harry she'd have to say . . . She could not decide which it was. So she kept quiet.

Then she heard.

"Gerty. I've got something to tell you."

He was speaking. At last he was speaking. This was the moment she had been waiting for. Now he would look at her with his black eyes, and fold her around. And peace.

"Gerty, what's the use of you looking for a job. You can't work all your life. You're not made for work. You've got to stay home and be taken care of."

He stopped, and she waited. Why was he talking? Why didn't he do it? She felt he was looking at her, but she did not dare to turn her eyes. He was gazing at her. His eyes traveled over the waist, went into the lace collar, and followed its contour

to the breasts. Her heart stopped. Would he recognize it? Would he be angry because she imitated his lady friend?

He began speaking again.

"Gerty, let me take care of you. I can do it. I'll treat you like a queen. There won't be nothing too good for you. I'll love you, and I'll honor you. I'll be dirt under your feet. You ain't made for an office. I'll be good to you. Swear to God, I will."

What was he waiting for? What did he want? Why didn't he take her? She was his. She had always been his. Hadn't she waited for him all this time? Did she have to teach him how to make love?

He was evidently waiting for an answer, and while waiting, his gaze traveled on her breasts. He was looking at them. And involuntarily she wanted to screen them with her hands, but then remembered who he was, and felt ashamed. He could do with her what he wanted. He could take all she had.

She felt his breath on her face, and closed her unseeing eyes. The moment had come, and she was not surprised when she felt his arms around her, enveloping, and his lips on hers.

And she said: "Yes, I'll marry you."

And he kissed her again and again, and she was satisfied.

Then she heard steps, and her mother came in. And she heard him say to her mother that he was going to marry her, and then her mother answered:

"Jim, I'm glad to hear it."

And she looked with her eyes. And she saw it wasn't Harry. It was Jim. Jim. Jim. Not Harry.

In one bound she jumped up, and rushed to her room. When she had banged the door shut, she threw herself on the bed and moaned.

"What did I do? What did I do?"

2

One of the Clerks

And if it isn't hell to work for the same firm eight years, to give all you've got all this time, to work as hard as you can all the period, never letting go, never taking it easy, for the whole eight years never once missing a day of work, or coming late, and in order to be able to do this, never going out at night, never drinking, even cutting out the smoking, just one thing in mind: work, work, work; to always say yes when Read says something; to always smile when old Glymmer is talking to you, especially when you know he's talking bull; or to listen to that damned fool of a Harry Widener, whose old man bought him a partnership, and who wouldn't know a gilt-edged stock certificate from Hungarian goulash, say something, when all he's doing is talking through his hat, and then to go out and do the right thing and try and make it appear as if he told you to do it, and if it does, then he's a bright little boy, and if again it doesn't, then it's all your fault, and look out; and to see, year after year, another

fellow who hasn't half the experience, or for that matter the sense, get advanced ahead of you, and become assistant trader, and boss you, and you usually doing all his work, and of course it's all because you're a Jew, and they afraid that if they gave you an opportunity you'd eat them up; as if it was hard to swallow such a bunch of sardines; and you all the time trying to show them that you're worthy of advancement; that all you want is a chance to prove it, that you've given up everything in the world in order to prove it, that your mind's on business and on nothing else, and then, when you've finally almost proven it, when at the end Read took you into the office, told you that your work was good, and that he appreciated it, that when the next vacancy occurred he'd advance you, and when you finally feel you're getting out of the rut, then . . . to have the whole God damned thing take a jump and go bankrupt, and if that isn't hell, what in hell is it?

And of course it's all right for them, who all they have to do is to go into another job; because they don't give a damn what they do; they're not like me, who's stuck at the same job for eight years in spite of everything, in spite of the hatred, and the kidding, and the indifference of everybody, in spite of

my undersize, and in the beginning of my strange clothing, who closed his eyes to everything but what I had to do, who sometimes had to hold myself for all I was worth in order not to give somebody a smash in the jaw, and send the whole bunch straight plump to hell, but who didn't, but kept at it, and thought something would come out of it, and now that nothing did, it's tiresome to start and do it all over again, even if I've got ambition that they haven't, and if I look ten years ahead of me, while all they see is a bottle of moonshine liquor at the end of the day and a girl on a bed . . .

They didn't have a father who didn't give a damn what became of you as long as you kept out of his way, or a mother who was dead when you were a kid; and when you were fourteen, and the law allowed you to leave school and go to work, you didn't want to do it; you wanted to stay and study, because you knew that without study you'd never get anywhere; and when your father said he didn't care what you did, but he'd be damned before he'd support somebody who could earn his own bread and butter, you went to work, but you kept on studying in the evening just the same.

. . . and then one day the office failed . . .

Then you went to work for Goldstein, the furrier —a mean guy—not that he was so mean, but that everything looked mean to you then, as everything does when you don't do what you like to, because you didn't want to be a furrier; there was no money in it, and you didn't like the business; you wanted to go down to the Street, where the money is made, and whenever Goldstein sent you on an errand, you took the subway downtown, and you got off at Wall Street, and walked to the Curb Market, and you stood there watching the trading, seeing the clerks in the red, blue, green, yellow coats, and the customers, and you'd hear the shouting, the yelling; everybody excited, rushing here, there, the telephone bells ringing, the boys running with messages, and you'd look, and your blood would boil and you'd want to be there, one of them; you knew you'd get along all right; you were sure you'd be a success, and you came down there oftener, until Goldstein, seeing that you neglected your work, fired you, and you didn't care, only you didn't tell your father, but came down every day, sometimes not eating in the morning, and having to walk three miles downtown because you didn't have the fare for the subway.

He had been walking up Broadway after having left late the office, noticing nothing around him. Usually when he felt something very strongly, he was angry, but now he was more tired than angry. A feeling of helplessness swept him. He was walking up Broadway with his usual stride, short, nervous steps, with the arms jerking at the sides, but the inner feeling did not communicate with this appearance. When he reached Canal Street and met the wild crowd that gathers there daily after work, instead of boldly working his way through it, he stopped and looked uneasily about. He felt himself unequal to this crowd, to this human avalanche that, curving and undulating, swept the sidewalk; gazed at it, then turned and crossed to the other side where the crowd was not so dense. Then he walked on.

People jostled him on his way uptown, retarding his walk, making him stop from time to time. Sometimes a woman passed him who swept him with a cloud of biting perfume that made him feel giddy. He walked on. He did not know where he was going. He did not think about it. From time to time, automatically, he stopped in front of a restaurant and looked at the menu pasted on the show window. It was time to eat, but he wasn't hungry.

He bought a newspaper, turned the page to the Wall Street section, then remembered and wanted to throw it away, but didn't and kept it at his side.

If you want to be a success in business, you've got to be hard, you've got no right to look at the other guy's crying; you can't sympathize with him, and if he's ahead of you, you've got to trip him and make him fall and get in his place, and if he's below you, you just have to forget him, because if you stop for one minute, it'll be too late; you'll never get a chance to catch up, because there's no death in business, and no love, there can't be; the better man wins, and if you want to keep going, you've got to be the better man, and it's no use looking at failures or at sentimental guys; their stories are sad, and you'd like to cry with them for a while, but it's success that counts.

And he knew that; he had known that from the very beginning; everything was against him; he didn't have a family pull, nor did he look like a bright little boy, he had to show what he could do, and he did, and he didn't give a good God damn for the whole world, he didn't give a rap if the whole world around him went to pieces, as long as he stayed

whole; he had no time for sad stories, he couldn't afford them.

Because if he got sick, nobody would care what happened to him; he could die right off, and nobody would bother, and if he became old and didn't have enough to keep him going, his bunk would be in the Salvation Army.

And he fought. God! How he fought. From the very beginning, until today. Whatever he got was because he made such a nuisance of himself, that they had to give it to him; he made himself so valuable that they knew they couldn't get along without him. He'd learn the job ahead of him, and he'd wait until something was the matter with the fellow that had it, and then he stepped in. And once he was in, they couldn't move him. He did it better than the fellow before him, so they had to keep him.

And it was all for nothing. You slave, you work your knuckles out, you almost get brain fever, at night all you hear is telephone bells, and names of stocks, you eat stocks with your breakfast, dinner, and supper, you're a living share of stock yourself, and what's it all for, if a bastard like Read can make a fluke and then you're out on the street, and you've got to begin all over again?

The lunch room he went into was a dark little place under the shadow of the "L." The place should have been white but wasn't. The walls, the tables, the floor, all originally white tile, now even in this half-light looked dirty and unwashed. There was a smell in the place, a smell of old beans, and of cabbage, and another smell, stronger, of old food rotting in the corners. People were sitting at the tables, in the armchairs, people with their hats on, slouching over their food, as if afraid that suddenly it would be snatched away from them; and indeed whenever any of them for a moment left their place, the greasy foreign busboy seized the sometimes half-finished dishes and hurried them away to the kitchen.

Half consciously he went up to the counter, ordered a piece of pie, a cup of coffee, and sat down at a low chair. He began eating, absent-mindedly, putting great pieces of pie into his mouth and scalding it with gulps of boiling coffee.

People were talking around him, in tired, anxious whispers, some taxi drivers joking in a corner, occasionally bursting out into great, heavy bursts of laughter.

"Hello, doing anything?"

"No, got the *World* too late."

"I got a swell job watching a factory. Nothing to do but sleep all night. Eighteen a week. And a bunk."

"Gee, that's swell."

"Listen, Jim, lend us a quarter. Yes, he promised me a job. For tomorrow sure. Yes, I'll give it back on payday, sure. Come on. Lend it to us. Didn't I give you when I had it?"

"Lay off."

"A cup of java."

"Ham and eggs."

"Get the hell out of here. Can't talk nice to you guys. Didn't I tell you not to come in here to peddle before? Want me to call a cop?"

"Come on, beat it."

The man went out. People were walking up to the counter, ordering, coming back with food, eating it, paying, walking out, others coming in. All through talk, whispers. "Got a job?" "No, couldn't get one." "Yes, I got one. A swell one. Two bucks a day." "Yes, he fired me for talking back to him. I've got a good mind to go back there and bust his jaw. Where does he get that stuff?" "Come on, lay off."

He was sitting in his chair watching the crowd

around. The wooden arm in front of him empty but for a wet spot where the cup of coffee had stood. Sawdust on the floor. Cigar stubs. Cigarette butts. Above men talking. Arguing. Talking, eating, paying, walking out. He was watching them.

They were a bunch of bums, a bunch of plain, ordinary bums. Wouldn't work any more than they had to. And if they did finally get a job, they'd keep it just long enough to be fed for a while and then drop it. They never thought about tomorrow, these men didn't. They never gave a damn what happened the minute after their stomachs were full and they had a bunk for the night. They simply didn't give a damn.

And they didn't look worried, either. They didn't care. They didn't want to build a future for themselves like he did. They saw no hope for an old age that would be comfortable, a home, enough put away to give one a chance to rest up before he finally quit for good. They believed in now, not in then. They lived now.

Or maybe they didn't; maybe they were altogether different. Maybe they had been like him, also full of hope, also looking ahead like he did, and maybe their office had failed too, or many offices that

they had worked in had failed, or maybe they had not belonged in the particular kind of office they had worked in; maybe they had wanted to do something else, like he had when he had been working for Goldstein, the furrier, and were not strong enough, or simply did not know how to drop the old work and start on a new one. Maybe they had not been able to live through the failures that had happened, or had never been able to fit themselves into the right kind of a job. They had been weak and had given up. The fight had been too hard for them.

Not that in his mind there was for one moment doubt that he would go on fighting, not that he ever actually saw himself as one of these men drifting into the lunch room. No. Only for a moment he became weak. He became weak in his brain, although back of it, back of the brain, there was the assurance that he would go right on fighting, would fight everything and would come through again. And this idea that he got just now, that of himself jobless and without hopes, only strengthened him in his resolution to go on until he came to the top.

He pictured himself coming into this restaurant, not as he was now, although jobless, full of ambition

and knowledge of eventual success, but really jobless, friendless, without a penny in the world.

He would come in after having long looked for work, looked everywhere and had not been able to find it. Everywhere he came they would look at him and say or only think: "You're a bum, see? It's no use giving you work. You'd quit after the first payday. You don't want a job, you only want a meal." And they'd say: "No, nothing doing today."

And he wouldn't care. He would know back of his head that really he did not want to work; he just wanted something to keep him from starving, just anything to keep him alive. He knew he would sometimes get a job, everybody got a job sometimes. He knew that nobody really starves, that they always find something in the end.

In his mind he came into this restaurant, hungry, tired after having looked for work. He'd have not a nickel in his pocket. He'd hope he would find somebody who would stake him for a cup of coffee and maybe a sandwich. He'd see somebody, go up to him: "Say, lend us a dime. Lend us a dime for a cup of coffee and a pair of sinkers."

He wouldn't get it. He knew he wouldn't get it.

He wouldn't get it because he'd never give it back. And after a while, after having asked a few other men and after having been refused, he would get thrown out like the man he had just seen thrown out.

He would stand on the street, would see some fellow who looked soft, would go up to him and: "Say, Mister, give us a dime. I just got out of the hospital." He wouldn't get it again. And if he would, he wouldn't get it on the day after. And then what?

There was always the bread line. There was always the Salvation Army.

He actually became frightened. In spite of the fact that he knew that he was young and ambitious, that he had enough money in the bank to keep him from starving for a while, in spite of the fact that he knew that tomorrow he would get a job, could get one, was known on the Street, had been offered jobs before, he became frightened. He began to believe that he was actually friendless and without prospects, began to believe that there was no future for him, that he couldn't get a job if he tried, that he could never get another place again. The picture of himself helpless stuck before him and drowned out the other picture, the picture of ambition. He ac-

tually was friendless, was jobless, was without hopes.

He had paid his check and had walked out, still thinking these thoughts. He was now walking uptown, seeing around him people who were hurrying home, people who had just left offices that had not failed, who on the next day would be able to come back to these offices, who had prospects, who had a future before them. And he walked slower, as if he had no place to go, as if already he did not have a home, nor anything to come back to.

The picture of the office he had left faded, and he saw nothing behind him. He could not remember when he had worked last, when he had actually been on a payroll, and actually had been sure of his tomorrow.

And he walked on and on, among these people who were hurrying home from the office, and he felt alone and helpless.

Then he saw a flag. A blue flag with white letters above it. He looked at it.

He could not decipher what it said. It fluttered in the wind, the letters mixing one after another, an "n," a "y." Then he read it. United States Navy.

He looked at it at first without knowing what he

was seeing. It went to this side, then to that, in the wind waving at him, beckoning him.

United States Navy. See the World. Learn a Trade. United States Navy.

He kept on looking at it. Learn a trade. Some years. No worrying, thinking about tomorrow. Three squares a day. Don't give a damn about anything. United States Navy. So much a month. Clear above expenses. Not a thing to think about. Just mind your business and eat as much as you want. No pushing, no trying to push another guy out. Not that he cared whether he pushed somebody else or not, but he wouldn't have to do it. Nothing but eat.

Now he was seeing nothing but the flag. Blue with white letters. An anchor on it.

Why not? Why not? Why not?

There was no reason why not. Three squares a day. So much a month. Everything provided for. No worrying.

"Thinking it over, son?"

Before him was a uniform. Above it a jaw. Hard jaw and eyes. The eyes looked at him. The eyes liked him. He was a good guy.

"Thinking it over?"

He looked at the recruiting officer. He liked the guy. The office had failed. What was the use? He was thinking it over. He did not know what he said:

"Yes."

The recruiting officer was taking his arm, gently pulling him. He responded to the pressure. The office had failed. No more worrying. He yielded to the arm. It was leading him.

Just before he went up the steps, he looked at the street. People were walking, hurrying to their homes. Hurrying from work. Home. They had a home.

He woke up. What was he doing? Where was he going? He looked at the man who was leading him. He saw a uniform.

"No!" he shouted.

And pushing the officer away, ran into the street.

3

John T. Glymmer

The thing for him to do now was to forget it. To forget it.

Yes, to forget it. If he wouldn't be able to forget, it would swell in him and burst out. It was more than . . .

"More than what?" he savagely asked himself. "Was it more than . . ."

No, he must forget it. Forget. Forget. Forget. A mother lulls a child to sleep. Sleep, baby, sleep. A mother lulls him to sleep. With his two hundred pounds and his clothes on.

"Sleep, Johnny, sleep. Your mother is right with you."

Leaning back, he tightened his fists and shut his eyes, thinking that in darkness possibly he would not think; he would forget. The springs of the car gently swayed, like a ship that threads water, and lulled, lulled.

He jumped up.

Who the devil cared if they lost their money? It was their own lookout. It was their business to go to a firm that was reputable. His was disreputable. His was a crooked firm. He was a . . .

No, no, he wasn't. He was John T. Glymmer, Treasurer of the United States. No, not any more. He was ex-Treasurer of the United States. Now senior member of the firm of Glymmer, Read & Co.

Involuntary petition in bankruptcy.

Now, please, he said to himself. Not all at once. He had to extricate himself. He had to clear his brain of the mess it contained. He had to resolve what he would say to his wife, how to face her. His wife.

He opened his eyes and gazed at the back of Henry, who was driving the car. Henry looked as always, slightly bent over the steering wheel, throwing quick glances to the right and left. His usual way.

Mr. Glymmer, looking at Henry's back, felt surer of himself. He felt he still had a world around him. It wasn't all destroyed. There were still parts above the water he could seize. He looked right and left as Henry did, with a quick glance; then, looking straight ahead, he began to think.

He was John T. Glymmer. By profession an office holder. He had held offices ever since he had been twenty-five, when he had been elected alderman. Alderman once. Reëlected alderman. Alderman. Alderman. Commissioner of Markets. Fire Commissioner. Comptroller of the City of New York. State Comptroller. Treasurer of the United States. Stop.

On every bill issued by the Treasury of the United States during his period of office his name was signed. He remembered the magazine articles that had appeared just before he left: The most valuable signature in the world. From Newsboy to Treasurer of the richest corporation on earth.

He sighed and, reaching in his pocket, took out a roll of bills and examined them. Here it was: George C. White, Register of the Treasury. John T. Glymmer, Treasurer of the United States.

Now nothing. Nothing at all. Just a bankrupt. A damned bankrupt. Worthless. His signature was worthless. From the most valuable to the least worth.

"Now, look here, Mr. Glymmer. Look at the fortune we would make. Why, you've got the most

valuable name in the world. Everybody would come to us with their accounts. Your name would be a magnet. You would have nothing to do but sign your name. And receive your checks. No depending on elections or on appointments. You could take a rest. You've done a lot of work. It's your time to rest."

Damn Read; he had believed it. He had believed everybody. He always believed. Mike O'Connor, the boss, had said: "Jack Glymmer's ears are worth a million dollars, but I wouldn't give a nickel for his mouth." And he might have been Secretary of the Treasury now.

He couldn't speak; he couldn't order; he could only listen and sign. The best signature in the world. Now, nothing.

"John, listen. The girls have grown up. They need clothes. They need shoes. I have to entertain. The girls must meet people. They must begin to think of marriage. Leila's twenty-six. She can't stay on our hands all of her life."

Or:

"John, they're laughing at you. You'll never be Secretary. You can't. You're not clever enough.

John, wake up and realize it. You're a good order taker. But that's all. You can't fool yourself all your life.

"John, you ought to take a rest. You want one, and you need one. And, Mr. Read says, you won't have to do anything there. We could live in the country. You've always wanted to live in the country. Trees around. And grass. And we could have a garden. You could take care of it yourself instead of taking a gardener. Just think, John, it would be so nice."

Yes, it would be so nice. So nice. Nice. Everything nice. Always nice. Always sure. When he wanted to run for office, it was: "No, John, wait. You'll get appointed. It's surer. John, you're only popular with the boss, you should take a chance at election." "Don't be a fool, Glymmer, you'll ruin yourself running for office. We'll get you an easy job."

Always easy. Always sure. Always nice. He never took a chance. He never went directly. It was always through somebody else.

And now there was no chance to be taken. He was done for. Politically ruined and financially ruined. He had burned his bridges when he had

gone on Wall Street. It had been political oblivion. They forgave anything but that.

And what could he do now on Wall Street? An old bankrupt without capital or name. Who could take him? What could he show?

An old bankrupt with a wife and three daughters.

Henry was driving on. Carefully, throwing darting glances. Occasionally stepping on the brakes and causing the car to slow down with a low sigh. Starting again with a spurt. Mr. Glymmer watched his back and unconsciously imitated his actions. He could never become used to the machine, and whenever they stopped suddenly, narrowly missing running into somebody, his heart rose with a painful stroke.

Now he became furious. Whose fault was it? Who had done it? Who had made him quit his work, the work he had always done, and start on a wild-goose chase? Who the devil had done it? he thundered to himself.

Read? Over and over again. Constantly. Unceasingly. Telling him of the advantages, of the profits, of the repose. Tormenting him. Annoying

him. "Think, Mr. Glymmer . . ." "Just imagine, Mr. Glymmer . . ." "Mr. Glymmer, why . . ." Painting pictures. Weaving.

And he, like a child, like a sheep to slaughter. He who had always prided himself on his judgment, on his discernment, he fell . . .

And now . . .

Read now was also ruined. But Read was young. Read knew affairs. A bankruptcy for him was a matter of course. He had to expect that in the course of his career.

But not Glymmer. His career was over. He could only look back. Look back with satisfaction or with terror, as he was doing now. There was no future for him. He had once been himself, going his own way, shaping his own road, almost reaching his destination. And then he had strayed from that path. He had gone in another direction to find that his whole use had been that of a stepping-stone.

But then he began to feel that it hadn't been only Read's fault that he had left the Treasury and had gone on Wall Street. Read alone could never have influenced him. He was used to such men as he. During his career he had met many of them, and though they tried to persuade him, one to invest

money in some particular venture, another to indorse publicly a new financial project, he had always successfully eluded them. He had always been suspicious of new things. He had liked to stay on old ground, on ground he was sure would not dissolve under his feet.

And here he had taken up a man, a man in whose proposition he had never had much confidence. He had agreed to drop everything he had been doing, and to start in a new thing. He had done it.

Whose fault was it? Who was responsible for it?

And he remembered how when he had at first been approached by Read on the matter, he had refused, more or less definitely. And the project had apparently been dropped until his wife had begun to sound him slowly. At first it had been but vague remarks, insinuations, hints dropped at random. Then she had become more direct. She had talked about his daughters. They had to be married, and for them to be married well, to meet the right class of men, the family was obliged to keep a certain standing. At the Treasury he had been nothing but a more or less glorified clerk. A politician, especially a small politician, commands no respect. His wife had become tired of being an employee's wife.

She had wanted to enlarge her sphere, to amount to something.

And he began to believe that it had all been due to his wife. It was she who had led him on the road to ruin, she in her insatiable appetite for advancement. He had not wanted advancement. He had been satisfied to stay where he was, go his own way. He knew his limitations, and was afraid to go into something that would prove beyond him. And she always wanted something more, something better; never satisfied. When they had just entered a new house and had hardly become used to it, she was already planning a larger home. The same with automobiles, with help, with everything.

And he became terribly angry. He clenched his fists until he felt the nails enter the flesh of the palms and bit his lips. And he saw nothing for a while. Just a black mass enter into him, and he fought with it. The mass was the failure, and his wife, and Read, and everything.

And he sat there in the car, with Henry in front of him, who was driving him home, and he fought with the mass. He fought with it desperately, inch by inch. He fought to recover his balance. He was nothing without a balance. He had to have things

about him in order, had to be able always to reach his hand out and take anything he needed. And what was in front of him was oblivion. Understanding. Helplessness. If he did not vanquish it, he was lost.

But he lost. As he fought he knew he was losing. He was slowly giving way. Giving way to despair, to nothing. One by one things dropped from under him, the beach dissolved under his feet, and the ocean sapped him. And he could do nothing. He could only sit and watch. Watch and think. Think.

The black mass left him, and he saw he was free again. Free to what? Free to . . . nothing.

But, yes, he was free to something. He could do something. He could pay back. He could revenge himself. If he could do nothing to help himself, he could at least harm others. Those who had harmed him.

And he began to think of revenge. Not on Read. Read had done nothing to him. Read had done only for himself. Read was only something he had met at the crossroads and had gone away with. No, who he was to make suffer was his wife. She with whom he had been all his life. She who was supposed to help him, and who had ruined him.

And slowly, consciously, he began to think how he might revenge himself on his wife. How to make her feel what she had done to him. How to make her suffer the way he suffered. To give her the agony of helplessness. To make her see ahead what he saw. A nothing. Nothing at all. No good or evil, but nothing. To make her grit her teeth at something she did not know, as he was doing, bark at some unknown enemy, knowing all the time that the enemy would destroy her. To make her suffer. To give her pain. Intense pain. Long drawn out agony.

And while he was thinking, although as yet he knew not what he would do, a joy took him. A joy in actually being able to do something. A joy in destruction. Mentally he was already ripping his wife to pieces, grasping her nerves and tearing them, hysterically drinking her blood. He became wild, his eyes roamed in different directions without seeing anything, and a look of insane bliss spread over his face.

And then like the general who, after having made his decision and after having gloated over his assured victory, cools off and begins to make strategi-

cal plans, he calmed down, took possession of himself, and with an inward chuckle planned.

He knew his wife, and now he could operate on a familiar ground. From long experience he could picture to himself exactly how she would look after a certain remark of his, what she would answer, even what she would feel, and he knew that if he would call her aside and impart to her the news of the failure, she would only blanch, but being with him, she would quickly recover and begin to make plans anew. Try to save something from the wreckage and be able to meet the world with a ready-set face. But if he were to wait until morning, when the newspapers came, he would give her opportunity to recover before she had met her friends, and the fault would be his for not having told her earlier.

No, the thing to do was to face her with the news suddenly, when she was off her guard, when the blow would come on her publicly, when she would be at complete loss as to what she should do or say.

Then he remembered that some people had been asked to dinner for that evening, and he feverishly repeated to himself their names, whether they had any financial relations and could know of the failure

already and be able to apprise his wife before him. But he quieted when he remembered who they were. There was young Bradley, a captain, who had recently met Leila and who appeared interested in her and apparently more interested in having a father-in-law who was on the Street. Then his wife's sister, whom his wife patronized, herself having made a bigger conquest when marrying. It was fortunate that his sister-in-law would be there. It would give him greater opportunity to torment his wife. And a retired politician who had formerly been in the same party with him, but who now occupied himself only with local gossip.

And he began to think that it was fortunate that these three strangers were to be there when he would humble his wife. The first would drop acquaintance with Leila, the second would gloat over his wife's downfall, and the third would spread the news through town.

And as he was sitting there in the big car, being driven by Henry, he did not at all suppose that what he was doing was ridiculous, that by disgracing his wife he was disgracing himself, that it was after all his fault, that he had allowed Read to speculate over the firm's capacity, that his wife would be pitied.

No, on the contrary, he meant to tell them all that it was his wife who had led him to ruin, who had forced him to leave what he was doing and to strike out in a new field. He would debase himself, yes, but he would debase her more yet. He was lost, there was nothing more for him to hope. He could not imagine what he would do next. And in the meantime he needed to wallow in mud, to show the world how thoroughly dirty he was; he and his wife. And if he could prove to the world that his wife was dirtier than he, if he could show that it was she who had reduced him, why then he would be comparatively clean. He was a politician always. If he could gain nothing himself, he could at least harm others.

And he thought how he would come home, would say not a word; yes, he might even whisper to his wife that they've had a particularly good day—which would give her a look of satisfaction, and would prolong her tortures after—would greet Mrs. Willis, would say hello to Mahoney. Leila would be with young Bradley somewhere in the garden talking, and then the gong would sound, and they would all come into the dining room, and Harris, the butler, would begin serving. There would at first be si-

lence, then somebody would start to speak. Even he himself might begin the conversation, leading toward vulnerable topics. Mahoney would begin his gossip, his wife would calmly listen to him, keeping one eye on her sister to see how she was affected.

He was completely quiet now; his plans had become purely objective, and he was thinking of his wife as of some foreign person whom he knew well, but who could not possibly affect him. It was not his wife whose humiliation he was planning, but somebody else. He forgot even that she had hurt him and that he was trying to repay that pain. When a nation is dissatisfied with its leaders, they try to turn that grievance into hate for another nation, and influence their people to make war. And in the frenzy of planning, of contemplated slaughter, the fire of hate is diverted, and the people march forth to battle, satisfied to kill, and certain that those against whom they are fighting are the authors of that grievance. Glymmer was similar to this. He had to hate, and not being able to hate himself, or an unknown Providence, he turned his hate against his wife.

Henry was driving on. They had left the city, and were now approaching Yonkers. Soon he would

be home, and his plans were not all made. He had to be sure of himself. He had to act the scene perfectly, otherwise the thing would be a complete fiasco.

He would wait until the dinner was well advanced, then would turn the talk toward some subject that could easily be turned to his use. Yes, his wife wanted another car. She said that since they were living in the country, the girls needed a new car. A small sedan. It would not be very expensive, his wife always added. He chuckled. He would give them a new car! He would give it to them the way they would never forget! A new car!

He would say something about the old car not giving good service. Carburetor clogged, or something like that. That would start them. His wife looking at her sister would answer that it was time they got a new one. He was sure that Mary would add: "Rubin showed me today his new car; it's a peach, and very cheap." Rubin was a young chap whom Mary was running around with. In the automobile business. Too bad, he would not be there; he might try to sell them a new one.

He was now actually enjoying himself. Planting the pitfalls for his family to fall on. Directing a

comedy that he wanted to turn into a drama. He had already fully relaxed; his mouth had opened, and a grin was playing over his features. The glasses had fallen off his nose and were hanging from the string on his waistcoat. And he made a motion as if to take a cigar out of his side pocket.

He would start them talking about the new machine, even adding, "We will see," and smiling at Mary, which would encourage her to continue persuading him. His wife, feeling her sister at her side, would fight harder to impress her. Young Bradley might add in a word or two. And Mahoney, dissatisfied that he was not allowed to go on talking, would eat.

And then his wife would ask the direct question. He knew exactly what she would say: "John, will you buy the girls a new car?" And then . . .

His mouth broadened into a broad chuckle, and his hand slapped his thigh, and full of anticipation at the scene that would follow, he said:

"You know, we are ruined."

And he waited a minute to imagine the effect such a declaration would produce. How his wife would look; how she would feel. And the girls, Leila looking at the captain to see how he was impressed. The

captain's face. Then his wife's sister's, and finally Mahoney's. His face would light up at the thought of the news he had to spread, and he would apparently not be able to wait.

And he sat there, in the big car, in back of Henry, who was driving him home, and he giggled at what he would do. What a bombshell! What a disgrace!

He had taken the cigar out of his pocket, and was chewing it, as he always did when he was satisfied with something.

Then, little by little, a look of fright came into his face. His jaw tightened, the cigar fell out of his mouth, and he trembled.

He, he, he, that's what he would do? That's what he was doing? Who was he? How could he? Who . . .

A little while later, when the big car, driven by Henry, had come through the gate and stopped under the porte-cochère, Mr. Glymmer, bent and trembling, got out and said to the servant who had opened the door for him:

"Harris, tell your mistress I want to see her. Tell her it's very important."

4

Marc Kranz

An unfamiliar heavy voice answered to his ring: "Hello."

"Glymmer Read?"

"Not any more."

He damned the kidder. He always hated those clever fellows. Trying to deepen their shallowness.

Since he was in a hurry—the transaction depended on speed—he quickly announced his name and asked for Mr. Read.

"Oh, the poet," answered what he recognized as Charlie's voice. "Well, it's all over, kid."

What the devil did he mean?

"I mean, it's busted. It's bankrupt," said Charlie's irritated voice. "The game's over. It's up. You can go back to your garret and write your poetry."

That was how he discovered that the firm had failed.

Now he was sitting on a subway seat, in a train

that crawled, wheezed, and stopped at every turn, a train that would never reach its destination. The passengers around him wore unconcerned faces as if the world had not come to an end. And the girl in front of him, with her legs crossed too high, a girl that he would at any other time have tried to become acquainted with, looked at him as she would have looked under any other circumstances. And in spite of the failure, in spite of everything having tumbled around him, he measured her with his eyes and tried to judge her amiability. And he was furious at himself for doing it; it was laughing at a god's funeral, still he could not control himself. And partly he was glad that this girl was in front of him, because he wouldn't think of what was in store for him until he actually knew what had happened.

The girl showed more of her flesh-colored stocking, and, as if unconcernedly, looked at him to see the effect. And he had the curious temptation to leave the train at the station she left it, and to stop her as they were going out, and ask her to dinner, and later maybe . . . He was shocked at himself for even thinking of it. But still he wasn't quite sure that he was incapable of doing it. And possibly he might. It would be a new thing. A thing

never thought of. A new sensation. To convince a girl, while in a dozen homes people bemoaned that they had ever met you. Love on ruins. Decadence.

Then he remembered Mrs. Collins and her little grandson George, to whom he always brought chocolates when he came to see his grandmother. It was good business. It made the old lady attached to him, gave her confidence in him.

"Mr. Kranz, if they told me you were an escaped convict, I still wouldn't lose my trust in you. In spite of everything I'd think you were honest."

Strange soul, she was. When Zuckor had at first sent him to see her, in response to an inquiry, she had been distrustful, had told him all Wall Street was composed of crooks, and she would trust no one. Her husband had died early, and had left her an undeveloped coal mine, and she had spent her life developing it, until it proved immensely profitable. Her married daughter had died, and had left her a little boy, and she had sold her property and had come to New York to educate him. And after long persuasion, she consented to speculate; she wanted George rich. And they had speculated, she had gained money and had lost it, but her confidence never diminished.

He laughed. He wondered what she should say when she heard the news. Would she still protest his innocence and her faith in him now? "I'd stick with you to the end," she had said. Would she?

The train stopped again. They were near Chambers Street, and soon they would be at Wall Street. And then he would rush to the office, and would discover . . . That he did not know. He did not know what would happen. He knew he was sitting in a train, going toward the office where he was employed as a salesman; that the office had failed, and that all his customers had lost their money. That it was all over. "The game's up," Charlie had said. He was to go home and write his poetry.

"Chatterton," he said. "Starve in a garret amid an indifferent world."

Yes, he said. But not now. Not in America. Not today. You don't starve. You can work, you can gain money. Money and women and liquor. And then you can go home and write your verses. Feverish verses. Write of railroads, and of coal mines, and of sweat shops. And how the blood beats faster to the tune of a ticker. And of the subway train that hums any song you want it to. Of stupid people creating marvelous things. Of virtue that

dreams of white thighs and of a passionate embrace. Religion that lies and deceives. Charity that gives the tenth of what it seized. Of might. Of power.

Then the guard cried out Wall Street, and he went out of the car.

And when he had climbed to the street and found himself in the shadow of the great masses of steel and marble, among other people that hurried, he felt exuberant. That was what he would write of. Of people marking little bits of paper that made railroads rise and gave birth to cities. Of signatures that enriched or reduced to beggary. Not of flowers, nor of bees, nor of the smell of the honeysuckle, but of things as they are. As they must be.

And so when he had left the elevator at his floor and was nearing the door of his office, he was happy. What did a failure mean? A few people would lose their jobs. A few people would lose their money. That was all.

But the mass of wires where the ticker had been and the disorder in the outer office disconcerted him. And more yet did Volpe, the Italian grocer, who came toward him as soon as he had closed the door. Volpe had a strange look on his face.

"Mr. Kranz, what is this? What does it mean?"

"I don't know, Mr. Volpe," Marc told him hurriedly. "I just came in myself."

"But my money—"

"Everything will be all right," Marc assured him. "Just let me go to see Mr. Read."

He went into the inner office and knocked at Read's door, and the junior partner let him in.

"Mr. Read, what is this?"

"Oh, nothing, Kranz. Just a little unpleasantness."

This was no answer to give. And the thing had to be settled. He wasn't going to lose all his customers; they had cost him too much effort. And Volpe waiting outside.

"Mr. Read, I'd like to ask you a question. Do you think everybody will be paid off in full?"

"Kranz, I can guarantee a hundred cents on the dollar."

He went out. Read was lying, but what was the good of talking? What could he do with this man?

There was Volpe. The same look.

"Mr. Kranz—"

"It's not my fault, Mr. Volpe. I don't know anything about this. You see—"

Volpe looked at him as if he were going to spit venom into his face, and cried:

"You crook."

Oh, God.

"You're a crook. A rotten, good-for-nothing crook. You stole my money. I don't know nothing about this man. It was you who took it. My money, that I worked for. I don't eat. My wife don't eat. My children don't eat. We keep our money. You steal it. You're a crook."

My wife don't eat. My children don't eat. You're a crook, Marc was softly chanting to himself as he walked uptown. I don't know nothing about this man.

Sentiment. Why should he care whether Volpe's wife ate? Or even Volpe's children? What had he to do with them?

He went to Volpe's house. Volpe did not want to buy bonds. He talked to Volpe. Honeyed tongue. Volpe bought bonds. The firm failed. Volpe's children did not eat.

But was it his fault that the firm had failed? Had he known anything about it? Had he gained anything out of it?

And then, why the devil should he excuse himself?

Even had he arranged the failure, had he gained by it, it was his own affair. It was chance. Volpe's chance. Every man to himself, and the devil take the hindmost.

He was not a charity organization. Nor was he a philanthropist. He wanted to write and needed to support himself while doing it. The end justifies the means.

He wanted to write verses, and he needed to earn the most money in the least time. And nobody could stop him doing it. He refused to starve. Let others starve. And if he could not support himself, he was going to let others support him.

Besides he had seen Volpe's children. They were a filthy crowd of brats that wallowed in the fish of their father's store, and whenever he came in to see the grocer they begged him for a penny. And to stop for such filth?

He was on West Street now among the docks crowded with ships and with merchandise. Around him great motor trucks. Wagons with tremendous horses. Drivers swearing. People shouting. The smell of goods, of water, and of ships mixed with the stench of horse dung. It exhilarated him. He forgot the failure, and Volpe, and Volpe's children, and

walked happy. Then he saw at one of the docks an old abandoned vessel. He climbed it, sat on a box on the deck and looked around him. And he saw life, the feverish, moving life of the waterways, and, beyond it, the steadier life of the city, symbolized by the steel giants, and by the thundering L trains that rushed through its body and fed it. And fascinated he watched, and through his mind ran a rhapsody of strength and of speed.

The sun set over the smokestacks of Jersey. It became darker. A haze of smoke hung about the city. Lamps were lit. The trucks and the wagons slowly disappeared, and people came out on the streets and walked a slower pace.

That was what he would write of. People working hard, and living hard, and loving hard. Everything done with all the forces possible. Living a full life, with no halfway emotions, without sentiment. Separate people didn't count. What was the suffering of a man to the life of a city? Individuals could not stop the progress, the effort of all.

And then he wondered. As he sat there on the deck of the abandoned vessel watching the city resting, he wondered whether he meant all this. And he

asked himself, deeply into himself, whether he believed it. Whether the accomplishment of many was worth the suffering of a few. Whether, to be able to create beautiful thoughts, he could ruin another who in a crowd counted for nothing.

And he wasn't sure. Somehow he couldn't explain it. He could not put it into words. But when he had asked himself, in himself, whether it could be done, he was certain it couldn't. There was no reason for it. There were no words for it. It may have been the false atmosphere he had been brought up in, or the few remaining conventionalities that mentally he despised, but emotionally he had to accept. And although he was angry at himself for doing it, although he was sure he could not accept anything he could not explain, still he could not. It nauseated him. It was like homosexualism: there was nothing wrong in it, but still it disgusted him.

And he tried to find an answer to it. He felt that when he could dispose of it, the problem would be settled. He could do anything, then, he wanted to do.

He had no prejudice against lying, against stealing. He would do the one as well as the other if

there were no restraining fear, no fear of being captured and punished. There was no question of a conscience there. No conscience existed.

But when he pictured to himself the people he had wronged, when he visualized the regrets, the sorrows, when he saw Mrs. Collins, who was ruined, and her grandson, who would be obliged to work, when he saw Volpe's children deprived of food, he felt there was something wrong. He had no pity on little George; why, he himself had worked ever since he had left school; and he knew that it wasn't due to Volpe's goodness that the Italian was saving money: it was more of a racial habit that he could not control. But still there was something wrong. The thing shouldn't be. It was. But it shouldn't.

And he knew that unless he solved this problem, he would have no more peace. The thing would annoy him. It would persecute him. He needed peace of mind. He couldn't have those infernal filthy kids of Volpe eternally before his eyes. He had to be sanguine and calm. He needed to think. Had to feel himself master of all these people to be able to sing of their dreams, of their ideals.

And he didn't want to suffer while doing it. He didn't want to starve, be one of those long and pale-

faced shadows that glimmer by as if from another world. He wanted to live, live as the others, enjoy life as the others. Have a clear mind like they.

And what did they do? Did they have a quiet mind while living on the good they had taken from others? Did they see little George and Volpe's children? Did it annoy them? Could they enjoy themselves while seeing them?

They could. They did not think. They had no imagination, no power to feel what others felt. It was he who could feel those things. It was he who could picture to himself the emotions of others, of people whom he created in his mind. That was why he thought he could write. That was why he wanted to be a poet.

And he sat there pondering over the question, trying to find a solution to it, an answer that would give him peace of mind, that would allow him to feel calm and inclusive.

The night was warm, and a slight haze hung about the city, setting the contours of it in bas-relief. Lights hung here and there. A policeman's night stick was heard as it struck a closed shutter. The shriek of a belated tug that hurried down the river with a blinding glare. A rare L train thundered

through the bowels of the city. A motor truck rumbled on the uneven pavement. The rest quiet, just a few lights and quiet. The city was asleep.

And Marc sat there on the deck of the old ship, and he tried to answer his questions, and was unable to find an answer to them.

And then he began to think that possibly Charlie had been right, unconsciously right, when he had made the remark over the telephone. Go back to the garret and write your poetry, he had said. Possibly that was the answer to it. To view the city and the life from far off, objectively, not mixed in it, nor as a part of it, but retired from it, looking at it from away. And forgetting material things. Forgetting the daily food and the comfort and women. Forgetting common joys and common life. A modern hermit living in the desert of a great city.

And he began to dream of a garret somewhere in the city, high up, from where he could see the entire city, the life of all of it. Where he could stay and sing of the people that crowd the streets below, of the great buildings downtown, of the smokestacks in Jersey. And not dependent on it, he would be the master of all of it.

He would sing a song of speed, of energy, in which

would be mixed the automobile horns and the tick-tick of the ticker. It would be full of blows from the boxer's glove, and of hits from the bat of the ball player, and of the noise of a policeman's stick as it strikes the head of a wayward drunk. The bums that throw stones at premature straw hats. The voluptuous dances in Broadway cabarets, and the obscene dances of the nigger dives in Harlem. The afternoon teas in Fifth Avenue hotels. The strange sight of sinners going to church on Sunday, coming out purified and righteous. Of the dance of sex. The dance of money. The dance of life. New York would shout through this. It would cry through it. It would live through it.

And then he laughed. And the same New York that he would sing of would destroy him. It brooked anything but difference. It allowed everything in secrecy, but nothing in the open. He would be the common enemy, the enemy of Irish policemen, and of the Jew tailors, and of the English bankers, of the whores of all nations, and of the pastors of all nations. He would be preventing their life. And he would be suppressed. He would be forced to compromise.

He wanted success. He wanted recognition. He wanted to be cried over and marveled over. He wanted to be adulated and encouraged and admired. People should bend their knees to him. He was a prophet. He was showing them their destinies, their road to the future.

And he could do nothing. He could not revolt, he could not shout. They would look at him with stupid expressions on their faces and inanely grin. He would be a curiosity, a freak. Look at the guy, ain't he queer? He's one of them Bolshevik ginks, I guess. Free love. And what's yours is mine, and mine is my own. A nut. Stock Salesman Scorns Sex Shackles. Debauches youth. Damned foreigner. Go back where you came from.

A line of gray shadows was moving from the south. The charwomen who had finished cleaning the offices downtown were going home, and one by one they dropped through the openings at the bottom of the tenements. The milk train rumbled in, and with a loud noise the cans were transferred into horse wagons that rattled off. A light appeared. The sky back of the office buildings was purple, that dissolved into rose. The first ferry with its great eye searching the city shrieked in the dock, and a

few passengers dispersed into the streets. A motor truck roared. The light in an early lunch room was lit, and the proprietor in a white apron came to the front to remove the garbage cans. More lights. The sky was brighter. The water of the Hudson changed from black to blue. Then a white foam appeared as a tug ripped through the water. A baby cried somewhere. Another store opened. Then another. The ferry left for Jersey. The noise became louder, a dull throbbing that came from everywhere. The baby kept on crying. A telephone was heard. A door opened, and a housewife, head covered with shawl, shuffled into a near-by store. A moment later she came out with a package under her arm. In a room facing the Hudson, a man and a woman were embracing for the last time. People appeared on the street. A taxi hurried by. Another motor truck. Another trolley. A line of laborers, spades clinking, came out. Through the slight mist the sun shone, red, hot, molten. The steel giants on the right were shadows. More people. More noise. Motor trucks thundering. Sirens shrieking. A loud laugh. The baby cried? An alarm clock. Another. Yet another. More lights. More people. More ferries. The air hot, dry, dusty. Children playing. A sub-

way station near by swallowed and spat out black masses that were sometimes tinted with red or green. The docks opened. Then a postman with a bag came. Lunch rooms full. The air clearer. It became stuffier. The light in the windows went out, and the windows became black. Noise. People. Light. The city was awake.

Marc rose from the box he had been sitting on, and slowly walked toward his home. His mind was made up. He was going away. Away . . . to Paris . . .

5

Robert Michelet

They were sitting there in Edith Robert's drawing-room, he and Edith, and they didn't speak, because she never spoke, she always just answered or reacted, and he did not know how to begin. She looked in his direction, through him, as if her gaze was fixed at a point a foot back of his head, and she smiled. She always smiled; with an intriguing smile, a smile that seemed to invite, that seemed to say: "If you want me to be yours, you had better begin." But he knew that the smile meant nothing. It was her usual smile. The smile she flashed on all her friends, even on him who was almost a relative. And he knew that if he should accept the implied invitation, she would gently disengage herself with a "Bobby," said in a low voice that sounded hurt.

Anyway he had not come up for that. He never came up for that. He would come up when he needed her help, as he did now, or when he had something to communicate to her from his father,

who was often too busy to do it himself, or because you couldn't neglect a woman who had been your mother's best friend, and who might some day—this although not official, he believed probable—be your stepmother. And then Edith was so pleasant to be with. She wouldn't speak, just smile her smile, and look at him warmly, with surrender. He would always be sure she wanted him, and would approach her, and begin to caress her. And then he would hear, "Bobby," and would stop uncertainly, feeling foolish.

But now he wouldn't let her master him; he'd control himself, and ask her to help him. She couldn't refuse him. She had always been against his going into business. "What is the use of Bobby's working?" she had said. "Hasn't Mr. Michelet enough money?" It was possibly even she who had made him think first of other things than business. Of traveling. Of seeing things. Of living. Not always cooped up among four walls, talking continually over the telephone, seeing the world through a telephone wire.

He was sick of business; he knew what it was now; he had tried it, and as before when he had as yet known nothing about it, but had instinctively

been repulsed by it, he disliked it. He had nothing against it as a means of making money; people had to make money; they had to live; but why he, why on earth should he continue to add to what he could not possibly spend?

But he needed to convince his father, had to make him see the futility of it. His father had been poor, and by a tremendous struggle had torn himself out of the mass and had become a power. He had devoted his whole existence toward amassing money and he could see no other way of living than struggle, battle, fight.

That was why he needed Edith to help him. She could convince his father that it would be useless for him to work, that he could do other things, could be useful in other ways than gaining. Edith could do that.

Edith still sat there, looking through him, smiling warmly, submissively.

"Edith," he said.

"What, Bobby?"

He wondered how to begin. It was strange to talk to a woman who might be your own mother soon, and who still was not so old that you might not make love to her yourself. Edith was five years older than

he, but actually she looked younger in her black brocade house robe embroidered with great golden roses. The robe was loose, and it fell on her with folds that clearly outlined her body that rose and fell as she breathed.

"Edith," he said, "it's all over."

She said nothing, but looked at him. Her nostrils reminded him of a thoroughbred horse; they quivered and trembled. A shining black mane, great eyes, long, polished neck, small nervous feet.

"Glymmer, Read failed today," he explained.

"Are you glad?" she asked him.

He did not know how to explain it to her. She had to understand it herself. He wasn't glad that the firm had failed. He couldn't be glad of that. Of people becoming ruined. Of people losing their means of existence. But still he was glad. It freed him. Momentarily, to be sure. For a while he need not think of business, of stocks, of profits and losses. He could interest himself in other things.

"I don't know," he said, "it seems so funny. A thing was and now it isn't. Yesterday there was Glymmer, Read and Company, a firm started long ago, in the middle of last century, and all at once it's gone. Disappeared. A wreck."

"Yes," she said, and looked at him.

"Don't you see, Edith? When father insisted that I go into business, I hated it. I still hate it. I hated it so much that, like when I was a kid in school, I used to hope it would burn down so that I shouldn't need to come down any more. And now I am glad it's gone, and I am sort of ashamed that I am glad."

He was trying to be honest with her. He didn't know how to say it, but he tried to show how he really felt about this thing. And it was hard because the thoughts that came into his mind were not words, but feelings. And you can't put feelings into words.

She was still looking at him with that damnable soft look, and as he was trying to make his mind clear as to what he should say to her, he felt her near him, and she affected him in other ways. Her robe was open at the neck. The neck was white; it looked soft, and the upper parts of her breasts could be seen. And he wanted to touch them. He wanted to put his arms around her, and pull her closely to him and kiss her, and with his face close to her bosom smell her. And he damned her for being like that. He had a problem and he had to solve it. It was more important than anything, more

important than everything. What did Edith herself amount to? There were women everywhere. He could always get them. What he needed now was liberty, to do what he wanted to do.

"Edith," he said, "I want to quit business. I don't want to go down to office any more. I don't like it. I can't."

He paused without looking at her.

"I've got to tell father. He won't let me if I tell him alone. He'll call it damned foolishness. A fellow's got to be kept busy or he'll get into trouble. He doesn't understand it. He was born in business, and that's all he sees."

Then he noticed Edith's breasts again, white, soft, touchy. And while talking he wasn't sure. He'd be damned if he was sure. If he shouldn't shut up, and come up to her. That smile of hers. Possibly finally she would be willing. Then he would fold his two arms around her, close his eyes, and feel her through, all through, drown in her.

"I think you're right," Edith said, "I'll talk to your father."

He didn't give a damn for his father. He didn't give a rap if everything round him went flip-flopperty-flop. He wanted to touch her. Edith.

"Edith," he said.

She sent her gaze again in back of him, and dreamily asked:

"What?"

Oh, hell.

"Nothing."

Edith smiled her smile.

If she would only say something. He couldn't sit there, forever look at her coiled in her chair, her breasts showing, and feel distant. It was more than anybody could bear.

"Please talk to father. Oh, hell! No! Edith!"

He rose, and, uncertainly, looked into her large black eyes, walked toward her. He was trembling.

She still looked at him, and when he asked, "Yes, Edith?" she opened her eyes wide, and before he could bend over her said:

"You know, Bobby, I think you like me more for my body than you do for myself."

He stopped, and for a moment did not think, and then when he realized what she had said, he cried:

"God!"

And ran out of the room.

"Fool!" he cried, as he seized his hat, "fool! fool!" as he ran downstairs.

"God! What a damned fool!" So he liked her body better than he did herself.

He jumped into the roadster, and in a flash started off and began to speed over the streets.

He couldn't understand it. He couldn't make it out. Here was a woman, Edith, who, whenever he or anybody else was with her, acted as if she wanted him to go to bed with her. She encouraged everybody, excited them, and then:

"I think you love me more for my body than you do for myself."

He hadn't started it. He had come up to see her because he needed her help, and she had made him forget what he came for, forget everything except herself, and then . . .

A teaser, a . . . but he couldn't call a woman who might be his mother *that*.

He drove slower; he was on upper Broadway, and it was late afternoon, a gorgeous, early summer afternoon. People were walking slowly, resting after the day's labors. Men and women. Girls and boys. Walking. Stopping at shop windows. Admiring. Walking on. He was riding slowly now with the rest of the traffic, at each corner being

dazzled by the dull, bloody disk of the sun setting over Jersey.

He felt quieter now. The picture of Edith sitting on her chair smiling dimmed. Nor did he think of the office that failed, that he was to tell his father that he did not want to stay in business, but wanted to travel, to live. He was free now, momentarily free, and he enjoyed himself.

And he thought how nice it would be to have somebody with him; to go out into the country and speed along the country roads. He would drive so fast that the villages would flash by, and the villagers stand by with gaping mouths. To have somebody with him that would not talk to him, but whose presence he would feel. To feel her (it had to be a woman) pressed to him, making little cries of fright as he would skim a passing hay wagon or narrowly miss a dog. He would drive with one arm, while the other would be around her waist, holding so tight that she would scream.

Then at a corner he noticed Bill and drove up to the curb.

Bill was with two women very brightly dressed. He was walking between them, happy, looking into

each passer-by's face to note how he was affected by the sight of such beautiful girls. Then he noticed Bobby and radiantly approached. He was evidently glad that Bob had his car, a long, yellow roadster.

"Hello, Bob. Miss Chalfonte . . . I want to introduce . . ."

Then after the introductions were over he bent over the steering wheel and whispered:

"Real stuff, Follies. . . . Yap."

The girls crowded into the single empty seat, and Bill sat on the mud guard, and off they went.

He drove as fast as he could without being arrested. He felt Miss Chalfonte warm near him. Her thigh pressed against his, and the warmth went all through his body, and whenever he could he gave her a side glance. She looked like a Mack Sennett bathing beauty. She wore the professional smiling look that seemed to say: "You ought to be proud I am riding with you. Look, everybody on the street is noticing me. I am a celebrity and I must smile, acknowledge the plaudits."

They spoke little. She told him her first name was Peaches. She was a movie actress. A minor one, he supposed. The pearls on her ears were false, but the diamond ring had a real look. She was

dressed elegantly, but not expensively, and she wore no make-up, like her friend did. But he was not interested in her friend. He was interested in her, especially since she told him that she acted. It was nice to ride with a real actress. She wasn't lying; she looked it. And he tried to remember in what picture he had seen her. And when she told him the different names, he remembered her perfectly. He remembered further that she had a wonderful body.

Bill was jumping on the mud guard, letting out little cries, making believe he was falling off. The other girl screamed each time he jumped, and then bent over Peaches and whispered something at which both girls laughed. Bobby wanted to know what she had said. He thought it was something smart. But Miss Chalfonte would not tell him. And he did not insist. He did not want to act childishly.

He liked Peaches more and more. He was very proud of her, and proud of himself, when at dinner in the Red Inn all the diners looked at her, and a few of the men tried to flirt. But she ignored everybody, looked only at him, as if they had been friends for years. She wanted to know about him, and he

told her, about the business and the failure, and how he wanted to travel. Then she spoke of a trip she had taken with her company to Honolulu for a Hawaiian picture, told him the mosquitoes were something terrible, and the Hawaiian girls all dirty, which proved to him that she actually had been there.

Then they danced, and she could dance. She leaned over him lightly, so he could feel her, every inch of her, but did not weigh on him. And she was soft. Her whole body reminded him of a pillow that was made to fit his every curve. The orchestra was playing a blues: sad, dreamy, passionate. And he closed his eyes, and felt that she closed hers, and they danced as one. Their hands held tight, pressed each other. The hand around her waist squeezed her hard, as hard as it could, and she snuggled closer. They danced a lot, and then they began to drink. And they drank much, too. He did not usually drink; he did not like the stuff. Anyway he was not used to it. But he drank as much as she did; out of one glass, or arms intertwined. He did not leave her now for a second, but always held either her hand or her waist.

Bill began talking of a private room; they couldn't

have any fun here among all the people. The girls agreed, and they all went up, led by the head waiter in black. And when they were in the room, the table was pushed aside, the carpet folded, and the victrola started. And now when they danced they held both arms around each other, and pressed one into the other. They kissed, and he became wild.

He was falling between two mountains, way down below. Falling hard, his hands and feet in all directions. The mountains were dark, and black, and cloudy, and somewhere under him was a valley, all green with little houses with red and yellow roofs. A stream flowed in the valley, and it was so transparent that he could see the yellow sand at the bottom. Big cypress trees grew on each side of the stream. And he did not think that he was falling to death, but felt he had to fall into this live valley, and he fell harder and harder. Turning now, whirling. On each side of him the wall of a black mountain and down below the little valley. The valley became larger and larger, soon it took up the whole horizon, and he fell into the stream. It was hot, burning. Then he saw Edith sitting on her chair in the drawing-room, showing her breasts and say-

ing: "You love me more for my body than for myself."

"Oh, please."

Four horses were trotting around a circle. Like in a circus ring. Four stallions. Gray. With womanish looks. They were trotting around in the sand. To their hoofs long needles were attached. They pranced in the sand, sinking the needles into his body and pricking him. The circle narrowed. The stallions galloped. Now they were running in a circle in the same place. Wounding him with their needles. And at the bottom was a dirty Hawaiian girl in a grass skirt with mosquitoes.

The door slid open, and a waiter's hand with a bucket appeared. In the bucket was a champagne bottle, a white napkin around it. The ice sang when the hand put the bucket down. And Bill looked real funny when he went to the door to shut it and to bring back the wine.

Her body *was* beautiful; and she was beautiful, especially now. Her hair all rumpled, and saliva at the corner of her lips. She had been talking now for

some time, but he did not hear what she said; he was too dazzled by what had happened. But now he heard. She was telling him that she had a chance to form a company of her own, had a fine director hooked up, and a fine story. She only needed a little capital; it would certainly repay anybody who would back her. The picture would be a riot.

"It's all about a Spanish girl," she said. "Her brother's a smuggler. And she's in love with a revenue officer, or whatever else they call them down there. And she wants to save him, and goes to the city to the judge, and he rips her clothes off. It's a peach, I tell you. And it gives me a chance."

He became instantly suspicious when he heard she wanted money. Hardened up, and inclosed himself. But then they drank more. And they danced more, and she kissed him again and again. And he forgot everything but her, and promised her everything she wanted.

And he began to feel sleepy and tired, and went to the sofa on which he had previously been with her and lay down. Things began to turn around him. Everything became muddled but her, and his last thoughts before he lost consciousness were:

"God! an actress! a real one! and mine. . . ."

6

Esther Thomas

It all disgusted her, completely disgusted her. Why couldn't they do things clean? When they did something, why couldn't they do it clean? Not all sprawled out, all falling apart. Showing everything they had. Their desires, their disappointed hopes, their expectations. Showing them to the world. Walking around naked and showing everything they had.

It was not what people did that mattered to her. What people did was none of her business. It was their own affair. It was their world that they were in, and within their world they could do anything they pleased, do anything they could possibly think of. No, what disgusted her was how they acted when their world was a failure; how they walked around all opened up for everybody to see their shattered world. Thinking that this will console them. Walking around with their dirty underclothes showing. People should be clean; they should seem

clean; detached and clean, and nothing should ever seem to annoy them.

She remembered her own family in the days when she had been young and had not needed to work, but stayed home with her mother and her mother's unmarried sister. They had all lived in the small town up-state. Not rich, but comfortable and respected. All had lived together. People had looked up to them. No dirt had ever been attached to any member of her family.

Then her dead father's brother had invented the sewing-machine attachment. And they had all invested in it. Had invested because the family was respectable and looked up to, and nothing would ever go wrong with any of them. All the tradesmen and all their friends had invested in the sewing-machine attachment. And things were looking fine. They would all be rich.

And then the company had failed, failed absolutely. Simply cheated out of something and failed. And they were all without a cent. The family and the friends and the tradesmen that respected them.

What did her uncle do? Did he run around and weep over his misfortune? Did he blame it on people? Did he run away and leave the family in

disgrace? No, one evening when they were all eating, he went upstairs and shot himself. And everybody continued to respect the family.

And here the office failed, and they all ran around like a lot of chickens with their heads cut off; lost their poise, their balance, their equilibrium; did not know what to do with themselves; did not care what people thought of them; did not care how they appeared to others. Just ran around showing their weak insides.

Yes, it disgusted her. It made her feel ashamed to be with people like this. With people that did not know what self-control was, what being respected, being looked up to, was.

People should not steal if they do not know how not to get caught. People should not lie if they cannot keep a straight face when the lie is discovered. People should not live if they cannot keep control when life fails them.

And as she sat there at her desk in the corner of the general office, looking at these people who had lost their balance and seemed on a sinking ship, trying to do everything in the world, acting heedless and headless, an anger took her, an anger and a self-pity that she should be forced to be with them, that she

should be forced to look on at them, and sometimes even talk to them.

She was tall and thin, and spotlessly clean. The impression one had of her from the very beginning was that she was absolutely clean. From the very outside of her clothes, way somewhere inside of her heart, she was filled with cleanliness, with purity. She was white. And she gave the effect of being white. And right now in this office that was standing on its head, she seemed out of place, and she hated it. She hated to be with these people, hated to look at them; she hated that somebody coming into this office might believe her one of these people, a part of this heedless and crazy mob.

She always liked to be apart, slightly away, never touched by the things going on around her, never soiled by the contact of the world. She did not want the life whirling around her to touch her, and to come near her. She wanted to be alone, all alone.

She felt she had a right to be left alone if she wanted to be. She never interfered into what people did, was never indignant over what they did. Only that they should not touch her. She wanted to be clean. She had chosen her life, had lived it like this, and she had the right to live her way.

A long time ago she had unobtrusively come into this office, had worked in it, had stayed in it, had even in a way made herself indispensable. She had always been alone in the office, had never made friends with anybody, and nobody had ever dared to come up to her and speak. She was respected, even feared. When people came up to her she always met them with a gaze so straight and so pure that they felt they were not with their equal, but with somebody much above them, somebody whose life was infinitely cleaner than theirs, and unsoiled by the contact of the world.

And this respect that she had created for herself had made her work in the office easier. She never felt herself part of the office, but always seemed to say: "Yes, I am here, because I must be here; but even if my body is among you, my spirit is somewhere much higher, among other things better and finer than anything there is below among you."

She had lived so, and soon she was to be forty and she was not dissatisfied. Her life was a revenge on fortune for having thrown her from where she had been before, into the maelstrom of everyday working life. And she seemed to laugh at fortune; she seemed to say: "Yes, you have brought me to where

I am, but you have not brought my thoughts below. I own my thoughts, and they remain above you, they are so much above you that even if I were to tell them to you, you would not understand me."

And she didn't know that the life she led was narrow, that her day consisting of rising from her bed, going downtown, fighting daylong the assimilating influence that was constantly trying to enmesh her, then returning to her room, and spending the evening doing more or less nothing, reading little, thinking less, that all these things were ingrooving her life into a narrow little channel, were making out of her a lifeless being, a being that was in all negative and in nothing positive; that her life consisted of shooing away everything and in taking in nothing, that all these people around her were living a much fuller life than she was, that their very vulgarity, the very fat of their lives showed them to be beings much more real, more human, even finer. She knew nothing of this.

She had never had a friend, had never known what it is to be able to unscrew the lock to oneself and let one's whole life pour out before somebody whom one finds responsive, who can appreciate what one feels in the way one feels it, who will understand

what one is trying to say before one has even finished saying it, who at this moment of intimate communion is really a part of oneself, even a part that is better and finer than one is in himself. She had always been alone, had conquered or had tried to conquer her problems all alone. Her family had gone out of her life so long before that any influence they could have had on her had been lost in the last twenty years she had been alone. Soon after her uncle's failure, her mother had died, and then her mother's sister, and she had come to the city, had worked. She lived very frugally, saving her money, always in terror lest what had happened before should again happen. She had lived alone, all alone, a small, narrow, little, selfish life. She did not know that her life was so, but felt that it was this very narrowness, this selfishness that was raising her above her fellow workers, was compensating her for the life she had lost, for the privations she had had.

That this office that she had been working in for a long time failed, unimpressed her. She had enough money saved to permit her to stop working for some time. She knew she would never stop, would never touch the money she had put away. It represented

her balance, the reason why she could hold her head up among other people, feel superior to them. She knew that tomorrow she would look for another place and find it. She knew that. But the little hoard she had put away permitted her to view this failure objectively, as a side view. She needed not to lose her head, to run around excitedly as the other people in the office were doing. She could feel superior to them and despise them. And this very disgust of the people, this very feeling of superiority, gave her a sort of pleasure, the only pleasure she permitted herself.

So she sat there looking at the office crowd, feeling superior to it, even unconsciously delighting in her disgust. And then when she felt she had had enough of this looking on, she rose and, saying goodby to no one, walked out. The office was forgotten. Everything was forgotten. She did not think. The feeling of aloofness was paramount over everything. And she gave herself up to that feeling.

Her room was small and high and dark, and all white and clean. Clean absolutely. No one could have ever imagined dirt or dust in it. White curtains, a white washing table with a rough wash rag

folded near the bowl. A high, narrow bed, all white. A chair; a table on which was a vase with artificial roses looking hard and dry. A straw mat. That was her room. Nothing personal to her could be seen. No garments, no personal knickknacks of a sentimental value, not even a photograph. There was nobody she loved, nobody she ever wanted to be with her, nobody whose gift to her might bring her remembrance of the giver, a sentimental remembrance that might soften her for a minute, make her feel weak and longing. No, the room was a defense against the world. At no time did she do anything which anybody might not see. Her life was open, and this very openness made her understandable, made her different.

When she came into this room, the sun was setting, and all the stiff whiteness of the room was changed into a soft, sensuous orange and brown. The bed looked soft and wanted to be lain on, the very dead white roses became red and alive and fragrant, even fat. The room became rich, full of colors, shades, lights, the slight wind blew the curtains, and the light reflected in them changed in different patterns on the walls. The room murmured, whispered, cajoled.

Another person who would have just eaten, and would have come into this room that the evening light had made soft and pliable, another person, no matter how hard this person might have been, how far away from life, that person would have relaxed, would have opened the windows wide, and sat down at them and looked out. Or that person might have lain down on the bed, belly down, and raising the head would have relaxed and thought about nothing, or just mused, thought about pleasant things that had happened or that were going to happen; just wasted time. The hour was just right for wasting one's time. The colors, the air, the breeze, all asked one to waste time.

But Esther Thomas, who had just eaten, could not waste her time. Esther Thomas, whose life for the last fifteen years consisted in being strained and hard, in always tightening her throat and looking at people fixedly and hard, could not suddenly become languorous. We cannot throw our life away easily. Life as we have chosen it sticks hard to us; it becomes a habit in us. Esther Thomas after eating never wanted to loosen up about the waist, never wanted to relax. If she would have she would have disappeared. Esther Thomas would have ceased to

exist. Possibly some one else would have been, another person of another kind, but it would not have been Esther Thomas.

And as she came into the room, it ceased to be soft and languorous and pliable. Nobody else was looking at the room just then, only Esther Thomas, and in her eyes the room seemed as always, a proper room, a room that she had made for herself, that answered her desires, if desires they could have been called; a room she wanted to live in, wanted to sleep in, wanted to be called her room.

Esther Thomas came into her room, took off her hat, took off her street jacket, did not adjust her hair, and spent the next two hours before going to bed. What did she do in the next two hours before going to bed? Esther Thomas herself did not know what she did. She did nothing and everything. She sat on her chair, she repaired a camisole, she took the cover off her bed. She did nothing and she did everything. Esther Thomas's life consisted in appearing hard before other people. When other people did not see her Esther Thomas did not exist. She was a protest in the face of the world. She was in all negative and in nothing positive. She had personality, but no individuality. When some-

body did not look at her or when she did not look at somebody, Esther Thomas was not.

There are people whose every moment must count for something. Who always must be doing something. Who at all times must create or destroy creation. They are wheels in the machinery of the whole, and they must always turn. If they stop then they cease to be. Esther Thomas had ceased to be fifteen years before. She was criticism. She was: this is so, or, this is not so. She was not: I am so, or, I am not so. She was opinion and not action. She spent the next two hours before going to bed waiting for the next time she appeared. She did nothing.

The light from the window dimmed, and the room became dark. Shadows ceased and darkness came, one shadow. A shadow of everything. Esther Thomas went to bed.

What happened afterwards may have been a dream or may really have happened. What became of Esther Thomas on the morrow does not matter. Her days were all the same. One looked at one of her days and one saw them all. And what happened the same evening before Esther Thomas fell asleep, may never have happened. Esther Thomas never

knew. If on the day after she would have been somebody else, she would never have spoken to herself again. She was not even ashamed of it, she was not mortified; she could never again think of it.

Some people came into the next room.

The walls of the boarding-house were thin, and one could hear everything that happened in the next room. Everything that was said and everything that was done. Usually one heard children crying, friends quarreling, somebody reproaching somebody else. Then later usually everything became quiet.

The people that came into the room next to the wall against which Esther Thomas's bed was were new people. She had never heard them before. They were new and they would not stay long. She knew that afterwards. They were a man and a woman, a *young* man and a *young* woman.

The young woman did not know the young man very well. She did not know whether she could trust him enough to go into his room. When he asked her to come in, she was hesitant. He urged her more and more, said that they would annoy the people around if she did not come in, and the door could not be closed. The girl still did not come in.

Then the man said:

"Now, come on in."

Esther Thomas had a feeling as if she were walking on a street and a street urchin had thrown an awful obscenity behind her, something terrible. That was how she heard the man's voice. The man's voice had a soft, heavy quality in it. His voice was obscene. His voice was soft and heavy and fat. It was a lip voice more than a throat voice. It gave Esther Thomas a feeling of nausea. It made her thin legs feel thinner between the sheets.

The girl came in. The door was closed. The rooms were quiet.

Everything in Esther Thomas rose and wanted to go into the other room. Everything in her was protesting. Then she knew what she would have to hear. She did not care about the other girl; she did not care what would happen; she did not want to hear it. She did not want to be a witness to what was to happen.

But she knew she would do nothing. To get up and protest was impossible. It was none of her business what people did in the other room. She couldn't interfere. It was as if she were interfering in a river going downhill. What was to happen had

to happen. She knew it had to happen. And she knew she would have to listen to it.

The people in the other room began talking, talking slowly. The girl knew perfectly well why she had come into the young man's room. The young man knew perfectly well. Esther Thomas knew perfectly well. They were all waiting for the thing to happen. All waiting, playing their parts.

At first naturally the girl said no. The young man expected that no. He knew what he was to expect. He seemed a very experienced young man. But then Esther Thomas knew that the girl's no meant yes. It meant yes after a while. The girl's no meant, the moment has not yet come. We must wait awhile.

The young man looked into the young woman's eyes. Esther Thomas might have been in the room with them. She knew the young man was looking into the young woman's eyes. She knew it as if she were sitting beside them on the young man's bed. He began looking into the girl's eyes, and she looked into his eyes, and the look went from one to the other. This preliminary boring of one by the other. Measuring of the one by the other.

Esther Thomas was lying stiff between her sheets.

She was lying stiff and rigid on her bed. She was stiffer than she had ever been in her life before. She wanted to scream, to fight, to throw her arms in the air, and she was lying stiff between her sheets. Her tongue small and dry in her mouth. Her hands dry and hard clutching the sheets.

Then she heard a movement. The young man placed his arms around the young woman and kissed her. She answered his kiss. Then pushed him off. And she giggled. A small, thin, sweet, oily, little giggle.

Then the young man began to make love, began to make love as a young man does who wants a young woman, and who has her at his side, and she is half willing. Made love wisely, shrewdly, he having the universe at his side, all nature helping him. Even the girl helping him. He made love to her.

Esther Thomas became young again. She stopped fighting, her fists left the sheets they had been clutching and opened up, she was soft and languorous. She became young again. She had never lived. She was only beginning life. The hardness, the fight, the anger left her, and she became beautiful. Beautiful and young and desirable. The room around her became soft. The blackness, the noises outside,

all quieted her. She stopped thinking, she stopped feeling, she only was. There was peace around her, complete peace. The young man in the other room was not making love to the other woman, but to her, to Esther Thomas.

7

Henry Clarke

When he entered the car, the other three were already there. The paper was spread on their knees, and Donner held the cards in his hand. They did not look up when he came toward them, but kept their heads self-consciously down as if they were saying: "We know all about it, but we don't want to hurt your feelings by showing you we do know it." They looked very foolish, these three: Donner, very fat, now that the day was over had unbuttoned his vest and visibly was breathing for the first time; the other two, Cooper and Whittings, typical insurance men, still looked correct, hair well combed, faces shaven, collars unwilted, clean. The flower in Whittings' lapel was fresh as if but a moment before it had been culled. They might have been going to meet a customer. Only did their permanent appearance look worn out: premature streaks of gray hair, and thin blue circles around the strained eyes.

They answered Henry's hello with a murmur, and each reached in his pocket for a box of matches to be used as chips. And Henry had the curious desire to shock them, force them to talk about the failure, make them uncomfortable. Right now each of them in his mind was painting pictures of what he should do if such a calamity overtook him. And it annoyed Henry to have them pity him; they whose whole life consisted of work, and who, if their business were taken away from them, would look like flies with wings torn off.

They weren't bad fellows. They were all good-hearted and sentimental, and would have given their shirts to Henry if he asked them. They liked Henry and he liked them. They were always together. All four lived in the little town in Jersey that had just been built. They all occupied cottages around the large common park. On Sundays they met for a foursome. And sometimes bringing their wives along they went automobile-riding through the country. Each one had a machine. Donner's car was larger than those of the others. He was older and therefore wealthier. But he never showed that he was an assistant vice-president in the largest bank in New York and that some day he might even be-

come vice-president. The other two were salesmen for a life-insurance company. Coming men, people said. One after another they would break records for policy-writing. They were good fellows, had nice wives, pretty children. They'd get somewhere!

Henry, too, had a good reputation. He was a statistician. One of the best in New York, everybody said. Had his life before him. Only it was too bad that he had gone with this firm. It stopped him for a while, to be sure, to have been in a bankrupt firm. It would take some time for him to pick up again. He should have stayed with the trust company from which Glymmer, Read, when they expanded, had taken him. Of course a man couldn't have refused the salary they had offered him. Any man would have fallen. And it wasn't his fault. A man like him, with a fine wife. One of the best ever. It was usual for one of them after an evening spent together to say out loud so everybody should know it was only a joke: "Mrs. Henry, where did you find this guy? If you'd have waited a while, look whom you'd get." Henry's wife would always smile, the others would roar out, while Henry'd be amused.

They began to play. Donner dealt out the cards. Each one picked them up, looked. Cooper said:

"A nickel all around to start right." He said it in a cheerful voice, but Henry felt it was forced. Trying to make him forget the failure. He looked at the players. Each one of them gazed hard at his hand, feeling his look. And Henry felt uncomfortable. Couldn't they understand that he cared very little whether his firm had failed or not? That as a matter of fact he liked it? It gave him a feeling of freedom or irresponsibility. After worrying for years over figures, if they were right; if he had not made a mistake that would cost the firm money. Suddenly he felt free. It was like a heavy burden that one drops off after having carried it for a long time. He was going to take a vacation now. He had promised that to himself coming up on the subway. For a week he'd stay home, work in the garden, fix up the house, be with his children. And then he'd look for another job. Everybody knew it would be an easy thing. Even his old trust company would take him back. They had promised him that. And so coming into the wagon he felt very happy. He was going to tell them about the vacation he would have, about the garden. He might even fix some of Donner's flower beds. There was nobody who could do it like him, and he had promised Mrs. Donner to

do it a long time ago. He was going to rest and enjoy himself. And here he met them, and instead of kidding him along, as he had thought they would do, telling him about being a bankrupt, suggesting that he run away, to which he had even composed clever replies, they were sitting sad and lifeless. And he felt angry at them for spoiling his holiday. After all he was a human being, besides being a statistician, and he counted for something even if he was out of a job. And he felt that they felt sorry for him as for a disgraced man, who had been discovered by his wife in bed with the maid, or had embezzled a sum of money and had been found out. And he wanted to hurt them, and could do it no better than by talking about the failure.

So while they were playing, he took out of his pocket the evening paper, glanced at it, and then smiled.

"Read ought to be proud," he said. "First page and half a column."

Donner looked at him reproachfully, and suddenly he felt ashamed for laughing at another's god, and replacing the paper in his pocket, continued playing. The train had come out of the tunnel and was speeding along the level Jersey plain dotted with enor-

mous billboards. The four men were sitting together, knees pressed one against the other to keep the paper level, playing poker, Henry contented and the others embarrassed, embarrassed by what only he should have been embarrassed.

"Mr. Donner," said Henry, "I think I'll go down tomorrow to see your flower beds. I promised to fix them two months ago."

Donner looked at him, and couldn't believe it.

"Aren't you going to the city tomorrow?" he asked.

"No," said Henry, "I thought I'd take a rest."

Donner was shocked. A man without an occupation. A man doing nothing. Living on his capital. Unbelievable.

"Henry," said Whittings, "Cooper and I have been talking it over. I think the old man would give you a job over in our office. They need a good man there."

"Thanks," said Henry lightly, "I'll think it over. But I won't be in town before next Wednesday at the earliest."

The game did not go on. They were too uncomfortable. Silently they all stopped playing, and Donner replaced the cards in his pocket. They took

out the evening papers and were careful not to read about the failure, so as not to hurt Henry's feelings, while he sat on the seat looking into space and in an undertone whistling a popular song. It was a wonderful life! No responsibilities. No worries. A wife and two kids. A cottage all his own. Enough for three months in the bank. Hurrah!

"Henry," said Donner, almost blushing, "come down to my office tomorrow. We'll talk over the possibility of having you over at the bank. I can recommend you."

Henry looked at Donner, fat, the vest open, catching breath with difficulty. Nice fellow. Nice, sentimental fellow. Only a bit damned fool. Can't he see a man wants to be free for a while?

"Thanks, Mr. Donner," Henry said. "I appreciate it. But I feel kind of tired. Would it make any difference if I came down next week?"

"No," grumbled Donner, "suit yourself." But his eyes looked as if he were swearing at this moment.

Henry stopped thinking about them. It was too much trouble. Better think about his wife, who was waiting for him at the station in the car. She'd be glad he was going to stay home for a while. She always liked that. They had met in college, and had

now been living together ten years. No fights. No quarrels. There are people with whom you must fight, and some with whom you never have any differences. You just live with them. That was Violet. Always yes, always willing, always sensible. A lot of blond sense.

And then the kids. Wonderful kids. Most wonderful ever. Everybody said that. None of your precocious youngsters, playing the piano at three, reading at four. Johnnie had begun to read at seven. And Ruth. Ruth was four. Just a plump, blue-eyed bundle set off by a fuzzy halo of gold. Violet must have been like that.

And the garden. The tomatoes had to be weeded or they'd go to the devil. It was a good thing, too, that he was free, he could weed the garden and paint the screens. They needed it.

He became aware that the papers had fallen on his three neighbors' laps, and they were staring at him. He had been smiling, thinking of Ruth and of the tomatoes. So for the good of the community he effaced the grin, and set his jaws. That's how a bankrupt should look. Fight. Fight. Forever.

"Get in the game and win, boys,
Every blessed mother's son of you."

In his mind he began to hum a college football song. And he was happy. God, how happy he was!

The train passed the white yeast factory with the name painted in red. Then the golf course. Empty. A man rolling the tees. The edge of the town appeared. A few cottages. Little gardens. The train slowed down. They had arrived.

As they were going out Cooper bent over him and whispered:

"Say, Henry, you don't need any money, do you?"

Henry felt angry, wanted to kick Cooper's shin, but seeing that his wife was near, did not do it.

"No," he said, "do you?"

Donner approached. He evidently wanted to pat Henry's back. So Henry pushed a passenger in front of him outside and rushed out of the train. They all walked toward the exit.

There they were, the three identical cars and the big one with the chauffeur. The four wives with the kids stood near the station fence.

"Hello, woman," yelled Henry across the fence. And she yelled back: "Hello, man!"

This was their usual greeting, and Mrs. Donner was always shocked at the brutality of it. But now it was Donner and the two salesmen who were

shocked. And they glared indignantly at Henry.

A minute later the scene was taken up by kids. His scene and Whittings'. For Cooper had none, and Donner's were grown up. And it was only after having rescued his head from Ruth's golden throttle that he whispered to his wife:

"I've got news."

And she answered:

"Not really?"

They drove toward the park. Donner lived first and he waved at the others as his car drove into the garage. Then Cooper. Finally Henry slowed down the car, and Johnny jumped out to open the garage door. Henry had said nothing all through the ride. He had been too occupied with Ruth and with Violet's hand that held his shoulder. The hand was warm and encouraging. And he knew that it would not fail him, and it was sweet torture to wait with the news. Would Violet stand to the test, or wouldn't she? Would she act as he imagined Clara Whittings would: become dramatic: "It's all one to me. I will not fail you?" Or like Mrs. Cooper, who would go out to cry if her husband had failed? Or just as he imagined Violet would act, take it naturally?

He went into the house carrying Ruth in his arms,

took off his hat, changed his shoes, and went down to the kitchen. Violet was there helping the maid.

"Violet," he said, "come here. I want to talk to you."

Violet said, "Just a moment," and presently came out.

She was wonderful, beautiful. Blonde. Blonde.

"Violet," he said, "I'm staying home for a week. Glymmer, Read failed today."

He waited a moment, his heart beating.

She looked at him, and then coming toward him, said:

"It isn't fair, you know, to try me like that. I didn't earn it."

He jumped to her and, crushing her, cried:

"I'm sorry, Violet, I didn't mean it."

And he kissed her, and the tear from her eye moistened his cheek.

And then he fell on the morris chair, and pulled her after him on his knees, and said:

"Violet, I ought to be beaten. I'm a rotter."

But she:

"No, you're not. Only you see you're I, and I'm you. And if you keep something from me, then we'll be lame."

He couldn't wait; he bundled her off to the kitchen, and ran out to the garden. Johnny had his overalls on. Ruthie too, much too big for her, falling all over her in great folds, and she was trying to work a rake that was three times as long as she, with great seriousness.

"Kids," Henry cried, "weed the tomatoes."

And himself went after them and crouched, and they all tore the weeds from the fat dirt. Henry forgot everything, the office, the failure, and saw only the little brittle plants that grew in the way of the tomatoes, and occasionally he was aware of Ruth as she quarreled with Johnny over the place to weed.

Then Violet called them all in. And they washed their hands and went to the table and ate. Ruth holding the spoon poised in the air, her great blue eyes open wide, aware of new wonders on this earth, discovering new things. Johnny ate too much bread, he might get sick. Henry looked at the brood, and was trying to invent a condition on the earth when a man shouldn't need to leave his family to earn his living. Or maybe it was the fact that he was rarely with them that made him attached to them. He looked at his wife again. She hadn't

washed away the tear spot from her face, and it stayed near her nose, a gray circle that accentuated her skin. And Henry's head was turning. He couldn't see how he had earned all this. So much happiness. So much peace. So little desire. Just life.

And he remembered that when he had been in college, he had wanted to conquer, to fight. He would be a great man, a man all men would look up to. He remembered that he always wanted it so that no man should fail to knew who he was. Henry Clarke was to be the most familiar name in the world. He had planned. He had hoped. And then he had left college, and had gone into life, into the place where most money, most power, was to be gotten: Wall Street. He had worked there. Fought there. His future was before him. He could become anything he wanted to.

And then the children had come, and he had become contented. He did not want to fight so much. It did not seem necessary for happiness. He was satisfied to stay with Violet and with the children. And if he had not been obliged to work, he would have just stayed home, have been happy. He wasn't

lazy: when he did something he did it well. And he never cried over his sort in the world. He never complained. But he never wanted much.

"I'm getting old," he thought. And he looked again at Violet and at the tear spot, and the thought shot through him:

"No, I'm growing up. I'm becoming a man."

Then Ruth was put to bed, in spite of her protests, and Johnny did his lessons. Henry helped him, teaching his representative, creating another man.

Then Johnny went up too. And soon Violet came down. And they put the lights out, and sat on the porch, and, arms around each other, gazed at the stars, and at the dull shine that, miles, miles away, reflected the light of the city.

8

Samuel Jacobs

Old man Jacobs asked his wife:

"Sarah, where's Sammy?"

"He didn't come in from the business yet," said Mrs. Jacobs.

Old Jacobs went back to his shop. He weighed out an ounce of snuff tobacco to Mr. Goldman, the butcher, took the quarter, placed it in the little drawer at the bottom of the counter, and went back to his book. Soon he was lost in the reading; his eyes took on a thoughtful expression, his lips murmured the words, and his whole body bowed backwards and forwards. The place was quiet; few noises came from the street. Occasionally a fly buzzed on the window pane, trying to free itself and come out into the open air.

Mrs. Jacobs in the kitchen back of the store prepared supper. On the wall in front of the stove hung the family copper pots, all shining, bright, red. The shelf on which the plates were was ornamented

with fancy paper. On the old cashmere shawl on the mantelpiece stood three candlesticks, two silver single ones on the side and a large brass for seven candles in the center. A big table took up the center of the room, covered with a checkered red and black cloth. A silver salt cellar was on the table.

In the shop Old Jacobs was reading the Law. Occasionally when he met with difficult thought he placed his finger on the spot and raised his head. And he tried to reason it out without reading the commentaries. He enjoyed doing this. He had read the Law many times, but he always came up against passages that had seemed clear, but that now demanded explanation. And when he had found the explanation to some puzzle, he was pleased, and when in the evening he met Mr. Rosen, who was great authority on the Talmud, he would confound him with the new point. And when his adversary was unable to explain it, he would do it himself, inwardly chuckling.

He didn't like customers to come into the shop. They annoyed him. Although they treated him with respect as a great savant, they sometimes asked ridiculous questions that exasperated him, or when a newcomer from Europe had arrived and usually ac-

cused the neighborhood of being impious, they would bring him to Old Jacobs and proudly show him to the newcomer, showing that in America too they had wise men, men who knew well the Holy Law, who could explain it, who could apply it; men who by constant reading of God's word became holy themselves.

Outside were fire escapes, pushcarts, merchants and buyers, and children. In the morning they usually made great noise, annoying Old Jacobs, but now in the late afternoon they quieted down. Most of the merchandise had been sold, only the remnants remained. And the peddlers remained on the streets in the hopes of selling the balance and of coming home with empty pushcarts. The merchandise was very bad, all handled and beginning to rot. And when a stray customer came, they hurriedly filled a piece of newspaper or a bag, so that what had been placed there could not be examined until the purchase had been brought home. Around the pushcarts children were playing, looking for stray fruit on the ground, in the unbelievably crowded places playing baseball or marbles. Very little boys and girls sat near their mothers' pushcarts and ate pieces of bread and butter, sticking their fingers in the butter and suck-

ing them. A policeman occasionally passed, tired after the day's work of looking at licenses, enforcing the sanitary law and settling disputes.

It was late afternoon, the time which people working tried to fill up as much as they could, so that the home-going time should come sooner, and people who were idle or home became bored waiting for their laboring relatives. The street outside had a relaxed look. The pavement filled with rubbish of a day's marketing rested, a slight mist rising from it, like sweat. People talked in tired voices, slowly, unanxiously. Not wanting to think, they tried to fill the time with idle remarks. Somewhere a street car was heard, the shriek of an automobile horn, a child shouting.

In his little shop Old Jacobs read the Holy Law; read it with satisfaction, with delight, as another might taste an old wine, or smoke a fine cigar; his head before the book, bowing before it; the hand on his beard, caressing it. The other hand held a silver book pointer in the form of a pointing hand. A smell of oriental tobacco was in the shop, mellowing the air.

Mrs. Jacobs' head appeared in the kitchen door. "Didn't Sammy come in yet?" she asked.

Old Jacobs looked up from the book. He was annoyed. In the delight of reading he had forgotten his son, and to be interrupted in what he was doing was like being awakened from a soft, sweet dream into shivering reality.

"No," he said, and went back to his book.

But he could read no more. The picture of Sam interrupted the sage counsels of the ancient rabbi. Sammy in his narrow trousers, his low collar and bright tie, with the curly hair flying on the top of his head, stood in the front of the page and looked at his father with a supercilious smile. And so that the book should not be desecrated, Old Jacobs shut it and put it under the counter.

His afternoon was spoiled. Whenever he thought of his son a vague uneasiness filled him, a sense of unknown. He did not know his son. He could not imagine what passed in the other's head; what his thoughts were, his desires, his ambitions. Everything his son did was foreign to him. Everything Sam desired seemed to him beneath the wish of man. The love of bright clothing, of money, of conquests in love: all that he spurned. When he had been younger, when he had been Sam's age, learning was the most important thing, acquiring of knowledge, of

wisdom. A man should call himself a man, not a bundle of idle desires. Of course, he realized that Sam was born under other skies than he, that Sam was the result of other surroundings. But still Sam was Sam, he was his son; he had his father's example. Why didn't he follow it?

When Sam had been a child Jacobs had taught him, had taught him to read, had even begun to teach him to think. But all his friends had told him to send Sam to school. This was America, they had said. Every one is equal. Every one receives the same kind of education. And if his son received another kind, he would be at a disadvantage in the face of the world.

And Jacobs had given in; had sent his son to school, where Sam learned things unfamiliar to his father, who had passed for a wise man in the old country, and even here in New York among people who despised books he still held the respect of his friends and his neighbors, who felt this man was holy, who spurned the comforts and the pleasures of life, for learning. Jacobs had hoped that when his son had finished the learning outside, he would be wise enough to come back to his father and study

with him. Wasn't he his son? Didn't he have his blood?

But Jacobs had been mistaken. Sam did not want to study when he had finished school. He had wanted to go to work, to earn money, to dress well, to go on Delancey Street and laugh with stupid girls. And he did it. And neither his father's arguments, nor his threats, nor even the few whippings Jacobs had administered his son to convince him that he was right, availed. Sam had threatened to run away, to live by himself. And Jacobs had surrendered. For his son to leave home would have been the greatest tragedy. Children don't leave their parents until they are married, when they are ready to start a home of their own. And maybe Jacobs still hoped that, as time went on, his son would be convinced, and would come back to his father's wish.

But if the father hoped that, he was mistaken. Sam never repented. He went to work and earned money, and even forced his mother to accept some of it as board for himself, which wounded Jacobs terribly. Sam had friends now, and always went with them, foolish boys who played cards and games of chance, and went around with light women, with

shameless faces. And whenever Jacobs, sleeping next to his wife, would hear his son coming in early in the morning and unsteadily undress himself, he would not be able to control himself, and would fall on the bed with a sigh so sad and so terrible that his wife in fright would wake up:

"What's the matter with you, Yankel? What is it?"

And then Sam had gone on Wall Street. He had talked about it for a long time, had even tried to convince his father that his way was right, that Wall Street was the best place to make much money, to become rich. The beginning would be hard, but then, after a while, he should be great and powerful. He even promised his father ease from the store. He would not need to keep the place any more, but have a house of his own and be able to read his Law day-long, uninterrupted.

What did Old Jacobs know about Wall Street? He knew it was a place with tremendous houses in it, where thousands of people worked, where there were men rich, so rich that their wealth could not be imagined. The Jewish papers he read pictured these men as bloodsuckers, as men who work their people to death. There were pictures of them, too:

great bunches of fat sitting on the workingman, and in their hands holding bags on which numbers with many zeros were written; people who steal from everybody to have more than they can possibly spend; debauchees, murderers, similar to those of Sodom and Gomorrah on whom God in his wrath sent pillars of fire.

And his son was going to work there. His son was going to become one of those bloated monsters that steal milk from mothers' breasts. And Jacobs could do nothing. He was powerless. And as time went on, and the boy received his first raise, and came home with a radiant face, Jacobs suffered. And more and more he enclosed himself in his books, reading them, delighting in them, finding in them an escape from the sorrow of his life.

And he was always anxious. His son away from him, away somewhere downtown where Old Jacobs had never been himself, frightened him. And he always imagined that something would happen to Sam, that he would be brought home on a stretcher bleeding, or somebody would come into the store and announce that the boy was dead. And so whenever Sam was late reaching home and a strange face came into the store, Old Jacobs' heart stiffened, and

a terrible fright seized him. And only when the stranger would ask him for a few ounces of tobacco or a package of cigarettes, the old man would breathe easier, wiping the cold sweat from his brow.

And so time went on, and the father inclosed himself more and more, and the son became more dominant. He almost patronized his father, the poor fool who did not know what life, what civilization was. And when he spoke, his voice was loud, condescending, almost despising. And Jacobs said nothing. But inside of him a storm brewed, and he knew that very little was needed to make him burst out. And then . . . A Jew's father should be a second God to him. He has the power of life and death over him. And now Sam was nothing. He was a bit of refuse that kept in the wind.

The mother said nothing. During the quarrels she always kept still until the tempest became too strong; then she would take Old Jacobs by the arm and silently put him to bed. Only once when Sam had been too insolent toward his father, did a fire appear in her eyes, and coming toward her son she had slapped him in the face with all her strength. She had become hysterical immediately after, and a doctor had been called in. And ever after that she

had remained quiet, only her eyes looked sad, and occasionally when the quarrel was too hot, she would hurriedly wipe her eyes with her apron.

People began to appear outside, workmen coming home. Some of them entered the shop for their evening purchases and chatted a moment with Old Jacobs. They spoke to him with respect; sometimes he even settled their disputes, when they were newcomers and afraid to appeal to the law. The evening papers had appeared and people discussed the news. Then Sam came in. His father noticed that the boy looked worried, wondered what was wrong. But Sam had immediately gone into the kitchen and not come out again.

The shop now quieted down. People went to eat, and the street was deserted. The pushcarts had disappeared and only the refuse remained. Jacobs closed his shop, lit the little night lamp, stood above it reflectively for a moment, his hand on his beard, and then slowly went into the kitchen.

The table was set, his wife pouring food from a pot into a large dish. Jacobs stood a moment silently in the doorway. The place was always dark; through the dim window could be seen the beginning

of a column of fire escapes that rose high above into the small patch of sky that appeared between the roofs of the tenements. Sam sat near the window, looking outside, smoking a cigarette. He looked small and worried, and Jacobs wanted to go up to him, take him by the hand and talk to him, find out the reason for his sadness. They were father and son, and they should be friends. But there was something that kept them apart, that built a wall between them. And the wall could have been climbed by Sam, but not by his father; he was too old for that, too dignified. No, not dignified, but wasn't he the father? Shouldn't the son come to him first? Wasn't he entitled at least to that?

He went to the sink and washed his hands, prayed a moment in the corner, his head toward Jerusalem, bowing before it. Then he sat at the table.

"Come eat, Sammy," said Mrs. Jacobs, "a little soup will do you good."

Sam did not answer his mother. He raised his head, looked a moment at his father as if he wanted to say something and then bowed it down again.

Maybe this was the moment. Maybe at last his son had seen his error and was coming back to him.

His heart rose a little in him. Maybe at last the moment that he had hoped for so long had come.

The boy was shy. You had to encourage him. You had to unbend a little, give in some. He shouldn't find before him a marble wall, but his father, his father who loved him.

"Come eat, Sammy," he said in a cheerful voice. "Come, you must be hungry."

"Father," said Sam, "I want to talk to you."

At last. At last it was coming. For everything you must wait. Some day it will come.

"What is it, son?"

Sam looked at him.

"I think you're right, father," he said. "I think you're right."

Was he right? He always knew he had been right. Only waiting for his son to understand it himself.

"You're right, father," Sam said; "it isn't worth it. I can't stand it. It's rotten."

The sun was shining in Jacobs' heart. Lord, how good it was, how good it was to have such moments. It did a man good. Everything was so good, and so fine.

"Father," said Sam, "the business failed today."

Old Jacobs didn't understand. What did Sam say? The business failed? Failed?

"What do you mean," he asked, "failed?"

"Bankrupt, I mean," said Sam, eyes looking down, as if it had been his fault that the firm had failed. "It's all over."

Old Jacobs still didn't understand it. He couldn't see it. Failed?

"Honest people don't fail," he said.

Sam didn't know how to explain it, how to show to his father that people could fail; that he had had nothing to do with it; he had only been a clerk there, an employee; that all he got out of the failure was the loss of his position. How could he explain it? What did his father know about these things. His father was an old man used to the Old World, whom the New World had not affected, had not taught, had not changed. And here was a failure.

"Don't you see, father," he said, "it was a mistake. Somebody made a mistake."

"Honest people don't fail," repeated Jacobs.

His voice had become hard. He did not know what to think. But he had to guard himself. He saw he was on the brink of something terrible. His son was in a bankrupt firm. People go bankrupt

when they don't want to pay money that they owe or when they want to keep something that is not theirs. Was his son *that*. Was his son a . . .

He rose from the untouched table, his hands clasped behind him, and walked up and down the room. His wife, feeling that a quarrel would start, had sat down on a chair near the door, and was furtively wiping her eyes with her apron. Old Jacobs walked up and down the room.

What did he want from him now? He failed. He was a bankrupt. His son a bankrupt. A man avoided by other men as a leper. And what did he want now? What other worlds did he want to destroy?

"Father," said Sam, "I don't want to go any more to business. I want to stay with you and study. I want to be like you."

He couldn't explain to his father the way he felt, the disgust at the whole thing.

Old Jacobs was still walking up and down the kitchen, his hands grasping one another as if seeking each other's help. His son did not want to work any more. He wanted to study. He wanted to be like his father, a man who lays by life for knowledge. He wanted . . .

"You thief," he shouted.

The wife had begun to sob harder and harder. She choked. She did not dare to raise her eyes from the ground, fearing to see what was happening.

Old Jacobs was standing before his son gazing at him with terrible eyes.

"You thief. So you want to study the Holy Law. You who have gone through the scum. You want to study. You want to touch the Holy Book with your thief's hands. You . . ."

Sam was frightened. This had never happened before. He had thought that his father would be glad of his resolution, would be joyful, would kiss him with tears of forgiveness. And now . . .

"Out of my house," shrieked Jacobs, "out of my house. You are dead. Damnation fall upon you. I have no son. I have no son."

Grasping his son's collar, he dragged him to the front, and opening the door, threw him on the pavement. Sam did not stir.

"Sarah," said Jacobs, as trembling he went into the kitchen, "tear your clothes. Your son is dead."

9

Some of the Clerks

The first moment was one of complete stupor. The thing was so unexpected, so sudden. Here they had been having a dull market day. Summer was well advanced, and nobody thought of working. Every one wanted to be outside, somewhere in a park, or in the country. Bill was dreaming of the big trout he had caught in the Delaware River. Every one of them had a favorite occupation for the summer, an ideal that he dreamed of, and which he despaired ever of attaining. So they dreamed more than they worked. The telephone clerks answered the wire sleepily, and sometimes gave totally incongruous answers to the inquiries. The bookkeepers lay on their sheets, head between arms, or slowly, very slowly, wrote out the figures. The market was dead, absolutely dead. Nothing stirring. A thunderbolt couldn't have awakened it. It was the beginning of the summer season, when the market is more a thing of courtesy than of act.

Traders come in from their summer homes, lazily buy a few shares, sell a few shares, talk of their golf scores, and go back to their summer homes. Nothing was expected, and nothing could have been expected.

Read and Glymmer were locked in the inner office with a stranger who Charlie said was the firm's lawyer. Nobody could imagine why. Zuckor looked worried. But then he always did; the least thing worried him. And then every one was too lazy to bother to find out. If they had wanted to, they could have. Somebody could have gone into the inner office on some pretext or other, and would have found out. But nobody bothered.

And then that louse comes walking in. That stupid electrician from the ticker company. The fellow they all kidded whenever he came in to fix the ticker. With that hick's face. Here was somebody to amuse them. Each one of them tried to find something in his mind to say to the electrician. Something clever and cutting. But the air was so lazy that it took them some time, and before they could actually say something, they saw that the electrician was cutting the wires of the ticker.

They all stared a minute without understanding.

The fellow must be crazy with the heat or something like that. And Bill, who was the head of the trading room, said:

"Look here, what's the big idea?"

The electrician snickered.

"You'll find out soon enough," he said.

He picked the glass of the ticker, took up the telegraph instrument, tucked it under his arm, and then was walking out. But before he went out of the door, he thought it would be a good joke to say:

"You guys ought to get a steady job next time."

The bookkeeping and trading room was in complete silence. The ring of Baltimore's telephone made the air quieter yet, since nobody bothered to answer it. It rang for a while and then stopped. And then Blackbird said:

"God! The fourth!"

Then they all understood. Blackbird was an old bookkeeper whose misfortune had been always to be in firms that failed. Three of them had failed already. So this was how they understood.

They all began shouting. Each one of them needed to. Had to clear his mind. It is very easy to think, when you cry about nothing at all; much easier than when you keep silent.

They were all swearing. Swearing for all they were worth. Swearing as hard as they could. Each one of them picked in his mind the hardest and dirtiest words he knew, and threw them into the air. It eased them up. Then they kept quiet again.

Each one of them thought of going back to work, and then decided that since the firm had failed he didn't need to. So they sat on the desks and on the tables, lit cigarettes, and looked independent.

Charlie and Phil Johnson began to match quarters. Every one thought it was a good idea; so they all joined in, and for a while only the clink of coins was heard, cries of winners and accusations of cheating. When Zuckor came into the general office, they felt guilty, and wanted to go back to work, but being in a crowd didn't, but kept on playing. Zuckor looked at them sadly, but said nothing.

If anybody on the next day had asked them what they were then doing, they would not have been able to answer. Nobody began things, nobody finished them. They did them together. After matching somebody pulled out a couple of dice and threw them. And after dice even cards were found, so they played poker. And then a fight nearly started, but this far they didn't go. If they had had liquor,

they would have gotten drunk. Better anything than thinking about tomorrow.

Here they had been working, working on and on, not even thinking about it, dreaming of a little ease, to be able to do on this summer day what they wanted to do. The air was lazy, indolent. And they felt that way too; lazy, and not wanting to do much. But there had always been something to keep them going: the idea that they had to work; needed to make a living. So they lived with this idea: having to work and not wanting to on this fine summer day. And then when the thing happened, when the bottom idea that they had to work, dropped away, when they saw the ticker taken away and nothing left in its place, they became afraid, afraid of what would happen. And being in a crowd —and in a crowd a man never thinks; he's just part of a thinking machine—they wanted to stay in the crowd. They were afraid of being alone; afraid of their thoughts. Each one of them in his nether mind had this fear, the fear that he would have to begin to think. So they stayed in the crowd, and thus defended themselves from their thoughts. And they wanted to do as much as they could in order not to think. That was why they were all matching quar-

ters, and shooting craps, and playing poker, and almost fighting. That was why if they had had liquor, they would have gotten drunk.

They were six in the crowd. There had been many more before; the entire office. But some of these had stopped being a crowd earlier and began to think for themselves; and, frightened, left the office, and took up their thoughts. But these six that remained, stayed in the crowd, and from then on until late evening, when they were all drunk, and had no thoughts even as a crowd, these six acted together, did things together. When one suggested something to do, they all grasped his suggestion eagerly, and all acted upon it.

There was Bill, who had been the head of the trading room. An older and a more intelligent fellow, who should have known better but didn't. A man with a wife and a child. A man with a future before him. A man who, when he knew where he was going, was as unbent as a steel knife, but when he was broken looked like this same steel knife snapped in two: lost and useless, and good for nothing in the world. A man who should have had somebody to guide him, but who didn't, and just by a lucky chance had gone as far as he had.

Then there was Blackbird. A braggart. A stupid little fellow. Was always talking about what he had done. Whatever anybody ever talked about had always happened to him. He knew everything. Anyway, he said he did. Contradicted himself in every other word. Shrewd, too. But in a little way. Never had the sense to be large in little ways and clever in big. Anyway, he couldn't be big. Couldn't if he had tried to. He was little in everything. And in this little way he was mean.

Ferrari was a wop. Even a God damned wop. With his slick, black hair and long nose. If you didn't know him you'd say you wouldn't have liked to meet him at night. He looked like that: tall, and beaky, and not to be trusted. But he was the best telephone clerk on Wall Street. Everybody said that. A holy wonder, this fellow. You couldn't beat him. And fast! Fast as hell! If he weren't a God damned wop he'd get somewhere. But you wouldn't trust him if you'd meet him.

And then there was Eddie: Eddie Drucker. A good fellow. Damned nice fellow. A peach of a guy, a white man. Only a little bit too good. That's why he wouldn't go far. He couldn't. He'd take off his hat, shoes, and underwear and give them to the

first person that asked him for them. And he was a bit dumb too. Kind of slow and big. And he wouldn't have kept this job long if the others hadn't helped him.

And Charlie. You couldn't keep a straight face when Charlie was around. They said he could almost make Zuckor laugh. Always cracking jokes and playing tricks, and singing, and raising hell generally. He'd make a funeral laugh.

And finally Phil Johnson. Never say much. Never talk. He'd work like hell, and you wouldn't know it. Now Ferrari, when he worked, you'd see feathers flying. Everything with gestures. Stage work. But not Phil Johnson. He was almost as fast as Ferarri, but you'd think he did nothing at all. He didn't belong in this crowd. He was out of place in it. He should have gone home, and stayed in his little room, and smoked his pipe. That's what a Swede does. But somehow or other he got into this crowd, and stayed in it, and he was almost as much part of it as Charlie or Eddie.

These six played poker, shot craps, and wanted to fight. And then when they had nothing else to do, they stayed still, slightly out of breath, looking around them.

Then Charlie said:

"Let's go uptown."

They said all right. They had been paid off, and their pockets were full with the two weeks' pay. And they were ready to spend that money. The day before they would not have done it. The day before each one would have said: "This much for rent, this for the grocery bills, and this for the movies." One or two might have gone into a saloon and bought a drink of whiskey. That would have been all. But this money that they received now, that was all they would get until the next job. And they didn't think about the next job. They didn't give a damn what would happen tomorrow. They were a crowd. And they were willing and ready and were going to spend every cent of their money this same evening. They were all going to be broke that night. Tomorrow they would all have to go to the savings bank, or to their relatives, or borrow from their friends, or just go hungry. But they didn't care about that. They were a crowd.

So they all picked up their hats, and were walking out. And they saw Zuckor. And Charlie being the first wanted to play a joke on Zuckor. He wasn't afraid of him any more. Like a little boy who on

the last day of school tells his teacher to go to hell, wanting to revenge himself for all the wrongs the teacher had committed toward him, Charlie wanted to pay back to Zuckor, to get even with him. So this is what he did: he bowed before Zuckor, tipped his hat, and said:

"Good night, Mr. Zuckor."

And Blackbird who followed him, also tipped his hat, and said:

"Good night, Mr. Zuckor."

And Eddie, Phil Johnson, Bill, and Ferrari all did the same: they all tipped their hats to Zuckor and said:

"Good night, Mr. Zuckor."

This was the worst insult they could think up to show Zuckor what they really thought about him. To show him that before, when they had greeted him, they had never really wanted to. That they had had to do it. Had been forced to. Their job had depended upon their saying each morning, "Good morning, Mr. Zuckor," and each evening, "Good night, Mr. Zuckor." That they had never meant it. That they had never wanted him to have a good morning or a good night. Because he had always been mean and small to them and had

wanted to persecute them. Because they had been in his power. He could have made them suffer, go through the agony of being jobless, of not knowing what they would do tomorrow, where their next meal would come from. And he had taken advantage of that, a mean advantage over them, being stronger than they were. So they said to him, "Good night, Mr. Zuckor," and of all the ways they could have thought up to hurt him, this was the worst way.

They felt *that* as they were going down the elevator, and they were astonished that they could have thought up such a fine insult. It was more than they could have done had they really thought about it. They didn't remember who had said it first, but they were glad that they *had* said it, and even proud of their own cleverness. And thinking of their cleverness made them quiet, not boisterous, as they went down, and as they took a taxi for uptown. They were quiet and dignified, self-conscious of their own cleverness.

What were the plans of this crowd, of these six men who had until that afternoon worked in the same office, been the parts of the same machine? They were sitting crowded in the same taxi, some

sitting on others' knees. They were going uptown. When Charlie had called the taxi, and they had all gone in, he had said to the driver, leaning his head out of the window: "Uptown." And the automobile had gone uptown. The taxi driver who was driving them uptown knew that this crowd was going to enjoy itself. He knew that they would all have dinner together, and begin to drink, and then go to some dancing place or cabaret, and stay there until late at night. And from time to time some of them would come out with one of the six who was completely drunk, and would order the chauffeur to drive him home; and then would come back to the dancing place, and perhaps themselves be the next ones to be taken home, feeling sick and faint, and throwing some of their dinner and some whisky over the interior of the taxi. This would go on until late at night, until the last one would be taken home, and he, the taxi driver, would go to his home calling it a good day. The taxi driver knew this, because these six were not the first ones to go on a party with their heads empty, not knowing where they were going. Very often he had been called to take just such a crowd, and to wait while they amused themselves, or while they were trying to drown their

thoughts in revelry or drink. The life downtown was too strenuous to be able to do things with a balance, with a setback thought. They lived too furiously, they worked too furiously, to be able to take their amusements lightly. They needed strong stimulants, boisterous joys, and from time to time they needed to forget what they were doing. To forget so completely that no thoughts of whatever kind could go through their minds. When they would just be dead. Unthinking and unfeeling.

But if the taxi driver who was driving them uptown knew what they were going to do, knew exactly how they were going to act, they didn't. Being a crowd, they had all taken Charlie's suggestion, and were following it. And their feelings about what would happen consisted of a faint, pleasant anticipation. Occasionally a man wakes in the morning having a feeling that today something pleasant is to happen. He feels happy about it, but he cannot remember what this particular pleasant thing will be. He knows that he will be happy today, still he cannot remember what his happiness will consist of. And in anticipation of this thing he cannot remember he feels happy already, and lies on the bed feeling well and not knowing why he is feeling well. So

these six did not know what they would do. Still they felt that what would happen would be pleasant, that they would enjoy themselves. They were going to be happy.

And if somebody had asked them, "Why do you want to feel pleasant?" and, "Why will you feel pleasant?" they would not have been able to answer. The taxi driver who was driving them uptown knew why they would feel pleasant and why they wanted to feel pleasant, but they didn't. He could have answered these two questions from experience, but they couldn't. The thing had never happened to them before. They were there like the many others who had been in that taxi going uptown to enjoy themselves, not knowing why they were going. Because the real answer to these questions was that they didn't want to feel pleasant. They just wanted to forget or to think they were forgetting.

And so they rode uptown, the six in one taxi, crowded, some sitting on others' knees, and they didn't speak, just sat there and looked at the pedestrians who were looking at them; and faintly they remembered that on ordinary days they also had looked at taxis filled with young men who were going uptown to enjoy themselves or to forget, and they

had envied these young men, who apparently had not a care in the world. And now they were envied in turn by the people who were going on the sidewalk, to whom this day was just an ordinary day. Their firm had not gone bankrupt, and they didn't need mentally to drown themselves. And they understood that occasionally when a taxi rushes uptown crowded with people, these people are not necessarily reveling. They may be as these six were now, perfectly unconscious of what they are doing, or may be trying to club themselves into unconsciousness.

And so they rode, until Charlie, who was momentarily the leader, saw a restaurant that he had been told was good, but had never dared to go into before, the prices being too high for a clerk's salary. But now he ordered the chauffeur to stop, and they all went out of the taxi, told the chauffeur to wait for them, and went into the restaurant, the green and gold bellboy bowing between them and seizing their hats from their hands.

They were a bit uncomfortable when they went in. The place was empty, and the many tables covered with white napkins on which silverware and cut-glass flower vases shone disconcerted them. The place

was so great and so empty that they were ill at ease, and they stood in the corner at the entrance. Even Charlie could not crack any jokes that would have broken the spell.

But the manager of this place they went into was like the chauffeur who had driven them there. He knew what this meant. He knew that this crowd had never been in a place of this sort before, and that only exceptional circumstances had sent them there. And people in exceptional circumstances please men like the manager of that restaurant or the chauffeur of that taxi. People in exceptional circumstances are never finicky about what they eat, or drink, and (this was the most important of all) about the price they are to pay. They eat, drink, and pay without a murmur, being in exceptional circumstances. And especially people like these six, who are not habituated to a place of this kind, and believe that the prices are so high that even when a manager like this manager does all he can to make the prices the highest possible, they are disappointed at the smallness of the sum. The manager of the place knew all this, since it was his affair to know it, and he was pleased that these six came here.

So he ordered the waiters to set up a table in a corner of the room, not too exposed to the other people who usually came into this restaurant and who might be annoyed by these six who came into it only under exceptional circumstances, because when people like these six come into a place of this kind, if they are not finicky about the food they eat and the prices they are to pay, they usually are not any more considerate of other people's comfort, and answer only the dictates of their own impulses. So they drink too much, and they overeat themselves, and, the most important of all, they make a great deal of noise, which annoys the regular patrons of a place like this, to whom this evening is like any other evening, and the food they eat and the wine they drink on this day is similar to the food and drink they consume on any other day.

So they all sat down. Charlie was beginning to master the situation and threw a few comic remarks, which at other times would have convulsed the others, but now, since they had not yet thawed out, only reached their still warm insides, but showed no effect on their outside countenances. Ferrari was really glad they had come here. Being an Italian, he liked picturesque displays, and he tried

to look as an habitué of this place by taking a chair before the waiter had offered it to him. Eddie Drucker, being a good fellow, was a bit bashful yet; he felt he did not belong here; it was not for him, a place like this. But Johnson took the thing coldly; nothing ever ruffled him. He sat down, pulled the napkin from the table, and tucked it on his lap. While that rotten little braggart Blackbird tried to show himself familiar with the place by calling the head waiter by his first name, but he must have guessed wrong because the waiter did not respond to him. Possibly the head waiter *was* called by the name Blackbird had called him, but felt that this little man with the frayed suit and repaired shirt was unimportant here, that the men from whom the orders were to be taken were Bill and Johnson, who took the thing most naturally.

They sat at the table, and the head waiter composed a meal for them, and they were served with something hot and melting that made them relax.

But not quite, because they didn't really enjoy this meal. It was a mistake to have gone into this fashionable restaurant. Now if they had gone into one of the places they always ate at, brought a couple of bottles of liquor with them, put a few tables

together and ordered food they were used to, they would have enjoyed it; they would have had a good time. Charlie would have cracked some of his jokes, and they, not embarrassed by the surroundings, would heartily have laughed at them, and tried to crack some other jokes. When they would have drunk a little too much they would have sprawled across the tables and chairs and slept. Some would have sung. Some even tried to dance alone some jazz steps they had seen at a vaudeville show. They would have enjoyed themselves. But here they couldn't. This was a place they were not used to. A place that was bigger than they were. And it oppressed them. People came in to eat. Men in full dress suits and women in evening robes. If they had seen these people dressed for the evening on the streets, they would have laughed at them. When they were small they threw snowballs at people like that. But here in this high-class restaurant they were part of these people. Not exactly a part, because they were a part and they weren't. That means they respected these people, but still were not of them. They couldn't laugh at a tailed coat or at a low-cut gown, because they felt that in this place of shiny white tablecloths and solid silverware

and flowers in cut-glass vases these people belonged. They seemed at home here. And before when they had laughed at them it was because they had always imagined that if they themselves, I mean these six, were dressed in evening clothes and their women friends in evening gowns, they would have felt out of place. But now they saw that there are places where, when you are dressed in evening clothes, you do not feel out of place. Places like the one they were in now. And so they couldn't laugh at these evening clothes, but if they had been able to, they would have felt less embarrassed. They would have dismissed them with contempt, and have been able to enjoy themselves.

So now they felt embarrassed and out of place, and they were conscious of their own clothes, unpressed and some of them old, and of their finger nails they had never given much thought to. And feeling embarrassed and out of place made them want to get out, but they didn't dare to. They were somehow or other afraid of the head waiter, afraid of the waiters and of the diners with their women friends of shining arms and necks. And they sat there hardly eating, just conscious that they were out of place.

Not that each one of the six was feeling the way that is here being described. They didn't. Because Blackbird was too stupid to feel embarrassed, and Ferrari did not feel out of place at all, while Johnson never noticed anything that passed around him, but calmly ate. Each one of the six felt differently about this place they were in. But as a crowd they felt the way that is here being described. And it is as a crowd that they existed the evening after the office had failed, because as individuals they would never have done what they did or what they were going to do. They would not have said, "Good night, Mr. Zuckor," nor taken the taxi, nor eaten at this high-class place they were now finishing eating in, nor done any of the things that will here be described.

Then suddenly they found themselves outside. Suddenly because, up to the moment when they had left the restaurant door opened by an obsequious bellboy and felt the cool evening air, they had thought about nothing, felt nothing. But suddenly they were outside. They really found themselves outside. Suddenly became conscious that they existed. And stopped short.

The crowd needed a leader. The first burst was gone. They had lynched their man, and did not know what to do. They had elected the candidate and realized what they had done. They had started a revolution, killed the old régime and stood unknowing. The crowd needed a leader. The crowd needed somebody, a selfish, cool man, who could play on its sensibilities, make believe he was working for their best, deceive them into thinking they were going to amuse themselves, but who in reality wanted only to further his own ends. A selfish altruist. An egoistic well-doer. France did not know what to do: it had Napoleon. Italy did not know what to do: it had Mussolini. Russia did not know what to do: it had Lenine. The crowd needed a leader.

If the leader could not be found, then the crowd was finished. It would break up, because a number of people, each small, each selfish in himself, each would try to further his own ends. Each would be selfish only for himself. If the leader could not be found, then the crowd was a failure. The crowd needed somebody who would amuse it, make it cry, or satisfy its blood instincts. It didn't care who it was, so long as he would keep it unthinking. Would

make the crowd think it was doing something. And the crowd found him.

Yes, the crowd found him. He was the man of destiny. Only of a small destiny. He would not save a nation from ruin or bring together the shattered pieces of a great man power. No, his destiny was small. A tiny destiny. The foolish destiny of keeping amused a small crowd of clerks who had just lost their jobs and did not know what to do. The travesty of a destiny.

But then the crowd was small, and its object was small. The object of being amused and staying amused until drink had mastered even the few faculties they possessed in their sober state. The man did not need to be a great strategist, nor a great idealist, but just one of them, in whom the hunger for the thing they were seeking was so great and so pronounced that he actually knew what he wanted. The man was Blackbird.

Yes, foolish Blackbird. Little, insignificant Blackbird, whom everybody in the office despised and laughed at, whose word nobody believed, who was known as a braggart and as a fool. He discovered what they wanted.

He discovered it because, behind his bragging and

his lying, there had been a faint idea. Even an ideal it might be called. A small and cheap idea. But then he was a small and cheap person. He had always dreamed of some day being able to lead just such a crowd through the rounds he had watched other crowds go through, through the half-shaded windows of cabarets and night clubs. This had been his ideal, his dream. He had often rehearsed it to himself. And now when the opportunity presented itself he stepped in. Kerensky was weak, Russia was dissatisfied, Lenine stepped in. Soviets were forming in Italian factories, Italy was dissatisfied, Mussolini stepped in. Each one thought of going home, but the crowd was dissatisfied, Blackbird stepped in.

So they were standing there in front of the restaurant that they had just eaten in, the taxi driver who had brought them there watching them carefully, even breathlessly (this was the taxi driver's bread and butter), and they did not know what to do. Each one began thinking of going home. Began to think. That is, almost began to think. For, had they actually begun to consider what they were doing and what position they were in, each one would have seized his head between his arms and run home.

But they had drunk already a little, and they were warm, and they were sort of sorry to leave this impossible dream, so they waited, not knowing what they were doing, and through their drink-fogged heads half thinking and half not thinking.

And then very simply Blackbird showed that he was the fit leader for this crowd. He showed it through leadership. He knew exactly what he should say. Because he said:

"Fellows, I know a place . . . women."

And he winked his eye. It was rather dark, and nobody saw him wink his eye. But this did not matter. The thing was done. The crowd was saved. Even the taxi-driver looked at him gratefully.

"Great," each one said, "lead us to them."

And back they piled into the taxi, and off they went. The crowd was saved.

"I want to put it across. I want to put it across. Lord, I want to put it across. I'm somebody. Yes, I am. I am somebody. I count for something. I want to count for something. I want to. Let me. Please let me. Lord, please let me put it across. Please.

"I want to be taken seriously. I want somebody

to look at me straight. Not laugh at me or tell me I'm lying. Lord, I'm not lying. I want the bunch to take me seriously. I want to show them that I know things. That I know them.

"Please. Oh, please. I want to.

"I don't want to lie any more. Make believe I have seen things that I haven't. Make believe I've felt things I never did. Make believe I've been to places I've never seen. Always lie. Always. I don't want to lie.

"I really don't, Lord. I couldn't help it. I couldn't. I really couldn't, Lord. You know it. Don't get sore because I've lied. It's because I wanted them to respect me. To take me seriously. Really, Lord.

"Don't punish me. Let me put it across. Let me show them. The real place. I don't give a damn if I die tomorrow. Really, I don't. If I can put this across, now.

"God! maybe it'll be closed. Maybe there's nobody there. I haven't been there in months. Maybe the police raided it. And it's closed.

"Lord, don't let it be closed. Please don't. Keep it open tonight. Let me take them there. You can do it. You know You can, Lord.

"If You let me, there's nothing I won't do for You. I'll love You, and I'll pray to You. . . .

"No, I won't, Lord. I'm lying to You. Yes, I am. I'm lying to You because I want to get something out of You. I won't pray to You, and I won't honor You. I know it. Tomorrow, I'll forget all about it.

"I'm honest with You, Lord. You can see for Yourself I'm honest with You. I'm telling You this straight. Straight off the shoulder. Better kill me tomorrow and send me to hell. But let me put this across tonight.

"Do anything You want to with me. Anything You please. You can do it. I'll let You do it. But let me put this across.

"*Please,* Lord."

This was how that fool Blackbird prayed to God. It was the first time he had ever prayed. But he had to put it across. He needed to. To live he had to do it. All of his life he had been a clerk. He had never had anything to do with the bosses, never had a superior but the senior bookkeeper, another clerk like him, usually much younger than he was, and marked by the superiors for advancement. A

man who would get ahead; out of whom something would come. A man with a future. But not Blackbird. There never had been any future for him. He had been born a clerk, and he lived a clerk, and he had always known he would get nowhere, that his last day at work before he died of an incurable ailment would be like the first day he had ever worked. Nobody would miss him, nobody would bother about him. Relatives he did not have. Nor friends. Nor acquaintances. Plenty of tormentors to be sure. People who annoyed him, and made him suffer. But how could anybody not torment Blackbird: he seemed to ask for it, seemed to need it.

One could not say that he did not have ambition, that he did not want to work at a better job than he always did, eat better food, wear clothing that was more expensive, and live in a place that was more comfortable than his little room on West Twenty-seventh Street. He did. That is, he wanted it without really wanting. He wanted all those things, but he did not know how to get them. It seemed to him that those were dreams beyond his power and that he should be thankful he was even allowed to dream about them. A real servant was he. A real minor employee.

And he was prepared for things like failures, for deep suffering. It seemed to him that this was his lot, that without suffering he would not be Blackbird. To tell the truth he even liked to be out of a job. The few people he knew pitied him, sympathized with him, and (this was most important) paid attention to him. Somebody was out of a job. Attention. A man out of a job. Take notice of him. What he is going to do? How will he live? Will he get another job? The terrific thing it is to be out of a job. So he was noticed by them and pitied. Sentimentally pitied. They saw themselves in his place, and really pitied themselves, not him. But when he had a job what did he matter? A man works; so does everybody work. A man must have something more than the mere possession of a job to attract people. And Blackbird did not have that.

But while people ignored him, Blackbird needed to live. Needed to express himself while living. We all do that in some way. But he did not find his expression in his work. The work did not absorb him; it did not interest him. It did not annoy him either, for had it annoyed him, he would have found some means of getting money so he should

not need to work. He simply worked and while working, while living, he dreamed.

And he dreamed the opposite of what he was. He dreamed of marvelous seductions, and himself patronized women to whom seduction was an unknown word, who answered a man's physical instincts like a poorly cooked steak answers his hunger. He dreamed of wealth, and himself was poor, never really wanted to be wealthy. Finally he dreamed of power, visualized himself in marvelous poses of courage, of leadership, and himself was weak and puny.

But sometimes a thing comes to us unexpectedly. We never really want it; we just dream of it, and somehow or other would like to have it, and all at once it falls upon us. And we are impregnated by it. We take it naturally; as if we were born to it. This is what happened to Blackbird. All at once he became a leader. At once he did what he should never dream himself capable of doing. And as Napoleon must have prayed before Austerlitz, so Blackbird prayed before the whore house.

And so they went in and patronized a house of prostitution. Boys will be boys. Sowing their wild

oats. It was the only place where they really felt themselves at home, where they could act naturally, where there was nobody to tell them exactly what they must do and what they must guard themselves from doing. Their word was law. Their desires were immediately executed. They were kings.

And they acted as kings: with largess, bountifully. Did not think of their pockets. They had gone in to amuse themselves, and they were going to amuse themselves. And they did. Everything was made for their amusement. They understood that the decorations were gorgeous, the drinks marvelously good, and the women very, very beautiful. Their beauty set off, magnified. And they felt better and richer in this place that was made for them than in the restaurant they had eaten in, where the surroundings were not for them, but for people with special, refined tastes.

Blackbird was transfixed. Gone was the falseness and the overbearing mien. Blackbird now was the real leader. A conqueror. He could well be modest now. He was not lying any more, but had made good, had arrived.

And the madam: a good soul! How solicitous

she was for each one of the crowd! How attentive to his choice, to his preference. How proud of her beautiful flock.

The girls were happier yet. They understood this crowd like the manager of the restaurant and the chauffeur of the taxi had understood them. This was the evening of all evenings. The night of nights. Sky was the limit. No need to measure their affections by the clients' generosities. No stint in that. No. Largess. Largess in everything. The end of the world had come. Hallelujah. We take all we can get. We feel all we can feel. Let joy be unconfined.

Everybody was happy, without exception; everybody. From the boy messenger who was sent out for drinks to a near-by saloon to Blackbird. From the madam to the oldest and ugliest woman. Everybody. Bill was happy. He forgot his wife and his duty and his children and was happy. Johnson forgot his reserve, Eddie Drucker his bashfulness. Charlie cracked jokes to the ceiling, and all roared until their sides ached. And Ferrari—Ferrari was magnificent. Like a prince he strutted up and down the mirrored, velveted, shining room and was happy.

Prudery! Senility! Impotence! Why must you

moralize? People are happy. People for the first time in their lives are feeling really happy. Do you know what real happiness is? Do you know what it means to be happy, to feel the joy of living, the joy of existence, the joy of the world? Why can we be happy in church, at home, when we are rich, or when we do a good deed, and not in a whore house? Why?

But these six that had come here after the office had failed, after a disappointing meal, did not think of these questions. The world had stopped. They were happy.

10

Harry Widener

There was no reason why he should go home at once. He did not know what he would say to his father. He did not know why he should say anything and was not at all sure he wanted to speak to his father. The right thing to do, the thing a son should do, is to go home and talk it over with his father. But he felt that this thing was something new, and he felt that he wanted to think about it before he spoke to anybody.

He had sent the car home and was walking uptown. He did not want to be seen by anybody, felt he would be annoyed if he were to meet a friend and be forced to go through the whole ceremony of information. He would have to speak about it. The friend would look properly impressed, would add a few words of sympathy. And he didn't want any sympathy. Something had happened he could not understand, and he was curious to find out what it was.

He really did not want to talk about the failure. He knew exactly what any friend of his would say, exactly how he would look. The thing was too boring. Why the devil should he speak about it?

And then his father. He would go home, put on a serious face, go into his father's study and say: "Father, Glymmer, Read failed today." His father would become angry, would demand explanation, would really seem very indignant, would say: "Damned crime." For two or three days there would be constant reminders of the failure. The money his father had spent for the partnership, the reflections on the lack of his son's business abilities. Then the thing would be forgotten. He would go with another firm. His father would buy him another partnership. And things would go on.

And he felt he did not want to go through this routine. He was terribly bored by the idea of what would happen, since he knew it exactly before. What he really wanted to do was to run somewhere or do something or hit somebody. He wanted to do something exciting, wanted to forget this.

The thing was really unpleasant. A firm had failed. Very good, a firm had failed. What had he to do with this firm that had failed? He had gone

into it a year before, had worked for six months, his father had bought him a partnership, had placed his son. The son had worked in the office because he felt he must do something. He was not interested in the work any more than he was disinterested in it. And here the firm had failed. And what was he due for? For talking. For discussion. For compassion.

He was walking slowly, unanxiously, with his stick hitting stray bits of paper lying on the sidewalk. A few times he stopped at shop windows and stared at the goods displayed inside. Before a sporting goods store he stood a long time and gazed at the collection of gloves, scarfs, at a canoe that, entire, was shown in the window. He did not really look at these things, he just stared at them and subconsciously thought of buying them, while his conscious thoughts went to the failure.

For the clerks he supposed it was a terrible thing to have a firm fail. They had been working there a long time, some of them many years. Their livelihood depended on this firm. They worked in it because they had to eat, not because they had nothing better to do. If they would not have had to work in order to eat, they would have found many things to

do, at least they supposed they would have. So he thought.

And he smiled. He knew better. He did not have to work. He did not need to do another thing if he did not want to. He could do nothing all of his life. His family was rich. His father had made enough for him to last a lifetime, even enough to leave his children enough to be able to live a life without work. And he had tried to live without working. When he had left college, he had decided he would do nothing. Would interest himself in sports, would ride horses, would become an amateur in as many things as he could: do nothing. He did not have ambition to do anything, and he wasn't going to. He had tried it. For months he was seen at every prize fight, at the ring, at every tennis tournament, golf contest. Had interested himself in things which he knew himself unimportant, and tried to like them, to absorb himself in them.

He had done this for a year, for more. And he had become tired of it. There was no fun in it. No thrill. There was no interest in it. He never became excited, never wanted anybody really to win, never felt anything at stake, never felt any risk. He thought if he could have he would have become

interested. But he knew that whatever happened things would go on the way they had gone on. He would go home, listen to his father, go to the club, chat a little, gossip a little, make love to some woman friend. Always the same. Never change.

So finally he had decided to go into business, had decided to interest himself in what his father had given his life to. His father naturally was glad, applauded his son, put him into a firm, bought him a partnership. He had worked in the firm. . . .

He never really became interested in the business. Never felt thrill. Never became interested. Life was the same. It was like a big sporting contest in which he had a lot of money wagered, but never so much that if he lost he would feel want. Things were always sure. He was always certain.

He had even tried to believe that this interest in the business his father had bought him was all he possessed; that he had to make a success of the venture; that everything depended upon it. He had worked hard at first, very hard; had tried to imagine that if he did not work hard he would lose his position, lose everything he had. He had tried to fool himself.

But little by little as he had worked he had seen

that things did not matter, that it is a hardship to get up every morning, at a certain hour go down to the office; that he did not want to feel every morning fresh and ready to work. On some evenings he had wanted just to forget everything and go out on a row, enjoy himself without thinking about anything, and not care whether he would be fit for work the next morning. He had fought against this feeling for a time.

But then the feeling for freedom had gotten the better over him, and he had let things slide; did not come down to the office every morning, and sometimes when he did come down, he was not fit and fresh and full of enthusiasm, but was feeling weak and sore and wanted to sleep. On those mornings he had not been able to think of business as the most important thing in the world. He had not wanted to. On those mornings the only things that mattered were sleep and quiet and a desire to throw a heavy load off his head. So he had lost more ground, and then but rarely had come down to the office. He preferred to stay at the club and send any business he had secured through the telephone. Read and Glymmer did not object. At the office he had been more of a nuisance than a help. And

obviously they had been more interested in his money than in himself.

But still there had been the office, there had been something to keep him on the ground. He had still believed that the office mattered, that if he were to lose it there would be nothing more. The office had been his personal excuse for existence. A weak excuse, but still an excuse. He still talked it into himself that he was actually working, was doing something.

And then the failure had happened, the thing that he had feared and had imagined as his test had happened; the failure really had come, and he saw that it made no difference. Why, there was always his father. There was always the money he could fall back on. What was a failure in his life? Some money lost? But there was more, much more, more than he could possibly spend. The business was not so important after all. There was always something else.

So that was why he had sent the car home and was walking. Trying to think the thing over, wondering why the world was not at an end, why he wasn't despairing, why he could not despair, why he was always sure. He did not want to be sure;

he wanted to risk things, wanted to worry, wanted to be unsure of everything, feel that at any moment the earth would dissolve under his feet and swallow him. And always there was that damned money, there was always his father, there was always a home and friends and people he could go to who would immediately help him.

Then he got an idea. Why not go away, leave his father? Leave everything: the certainty, the assurance, the knowledge that things were right, that they always will be right. Go away and be by himself. Leave his friends and his near ones. Be alone and dependent only upon himself and upon nobody else. Feel that he would not go back home, would not do it under any circumstance. Feel that everything depended only on him.

Then he would have peace of mind; then he would be happy. He would be responsible for himself, would have to feed himself, and find shelter for the night, and take care of himself. Then he would finally feel a risk, feel that something was at stake. Go away and be alone, all alone, solve all of his problems by himself, not helped by others, without feeling that whatever happened there would always

be some place to go to. No, what he wanted was to have the feeling that if tomorrow he were to fall sick, a calamity would really ensue, something terrible would happen. He wanted things to go wrong, wanted to find himself in these things, wanted to measure himself by personal standards, wanted to feel ownership over himself.

And as he began to think that, he already imagined himself alone, fighting his battles by himself, responsible for himself, starting life from the bottom and working himself up the scale of comfort and of ease. For everything he would receive he would have only himself to praise or to blame, would not need to feel thankful to anybody.

And he began to imagine to himself that he was already all alone, that he was not going home, but to some other place, a place he did not know. That he was alone in the city, had just come in from some other place, and was starting life. He would have to find a room for the night. Tomorrow he would have to look for a job to feed himself. He counted the money in his pocket and found he had enough to last him some two weeks. He would have to find a job very soon; not a job that he liked, but anything he could get, anything that would feed him. As a

matter of fact he felt he preferred not to work in an office, but to go out somewhere to a freight yard or work on the railroad. That was where men usually began; that was the place from which people started. He knew something about it. He had been in the Transportation Service in France. They would be only too glad to find somebody who knew something about the work.

He'd begin as a brakeman or a fireman, would ride the engine, would go across the country. There would be no more of the office, no more of the correctness, no more doing things as they should be done, acting as one should act. No, he'd tear across the country on the back of an engine, dirty and sooty, would oil her, would take care of her. He would be happy.

He was walking with great strides now, noticing nobody, his stick making great circles in the air. His face took on a look of relaxation. He knew what he would do. He knew how he would do it. His father was forgotten, his home was forgotten, his friends were forgotten. A new life was beginning.

By God, he'd do it! Why not? Why shouldn't he? Who was to stop him? Who could prevent

him from not going home? from going somewhere else? from doing these things himself? from being his own master? He could do things as he wanted to do them. And if he stopped being dependent he would become his own master.

Blackness all around him, he would stand on the back of a locomotive as it rushed and shrieked through the night, with its great white eye searching the darkness. From time to time he would open its sizzling jaw and feed it. Blackness would be all around him. Before him nothing, just blackness. Speed and strength into blackness.

Then two women faces came into his mind: the face of Roberta and the face of Gertrude Donovan. The face of Roberta came first, and he was not surprised at it. He was even surprised he had not thought of her before. She was the only person who really might be able to hold him back from doing what he thought of doing, the only person he felt any affection for and to whom he was attached. Roberta, to whom he could always talk, who always understood what he felt even before he said it; Roberta, who was possibly the only real friend he had. Of course if he were to leave everything he

would have to leave her, too; he would have to forget her. Not that it would be hard to forget her. No, she represented another link in his present life, a link that with all the others he would have to drop if he wanted to be free. Because with Roberta came his father, and his friends, and the home, and the security. The peace of mind. And what he wanted now was not peace of mind; he wanted to be misunderstood; he wanted to feel hurt. He did not want people to like him, because liking him involved knowing all his environment, knowing everything about him, involved liking his father. He had done nothing that he should be liked, had not earned the right to be liked. Everything he would get now would be of his own making. People would like him because of himself.

And then there was Gertrude Donovan. Funny that she should have come into his mind, though he had never spoken twenty words to her. She had worked in the office that he had until this afternoon worked in. She had been a stenographer there. And a quiet stenographer: never heard much; she never spoke. They had even rarely seen each other. But somehow he had felt even from the beginning a certain sympathy, a certain understanding; an un-

derstanding that was deeper than that between him and Roberta, since even words were unnecessary and knowing each other was unnecessary for him to feel it. Only occasionally had he looked at her or had she looked at him. And even then when they discovered themselves looking at each other, their eyes dropped. There was nothing common to them. Their worlds were altogether different. There was really nothing that could exist between them. But still he had always had a secret feeling that if he were to come to her one day and put his hand out to her, she would give him her hand, and the thing would be done. He had never known why he had thought so; he had never really seriously thought about it, but still he had known it; he had been certain of it. She was a real person to him; she existed toward him. There could be no vulgarity between them, no misunderstanding, no cheapness. And he had never spoken to her, and had but rarely looked at her.

He was still walking uptown; he had passed Fourteenth Street, crossed Union Square and walked up Broadway. He saw nothing around him. Sometimes he pushed people, sometimes his stick inadvertently struck somebody, but he did not notice

this, but walked, the person struck looking indignantly at him, and he oblivious of everything but his thoughts.

Then he got an idea. Why not take her with him? Why not have her with him? She would be the person for him, a person who liked him for himself, who, when she looked at him, saw only himself and not his environment. A person who would understand him; Gertrude Donovan would understand him. He knew that. He knew it as certainly as he knew that the office had failed, as certainly as he knew anything.

Then he would have responsibility. Then he would have risk. Then he would have a real problem. Shielding somebody he cared for from trouble. Somebody he cared for. He wondered himself that he dared to think of it in that way. Who was he to Gertrude Donovan, and who was she to him? Really how dared he think of her in that way? They had been two people in the office. He an employer and she an employee. He was rich and she was poor. He had never seriously thought of working, and she had probably worked from the time she had been able to. She was somebody, a real person, a real human being who had her place,

while he was nothing. Without his father he was nothing. He did not exist. If his father were suddenly to be taken away from him, he would cease to exist. She could have held her own anywhere, a self-sufficient woman, while he was dependent, dependent upon everything.

And then he thought that for this very reason he should take her with him; for the reason that she was a human being, that he could not lie being with her or fool himself being with her, for the reason that she knew life and he didn't, for the reason that she was real and he wasn't. She would show him what life really was; she would teach him how to live.

He thought that life was something mysterious that he did not know anything about. That it held something which only struggle and fight would bring out: a certain content, a certain satisfaction. He thought that the very want, the very discomfort of life to a person struggling made life livable. He thought so. And he wanted to know what it was. He wanted really to live. He knew nothing about it, he could not imagine what it was, but he thought a thing like that existed; and he wanted to find it;

and he thought that Gertrude Donovan would help him. And that was why he wanted her.

He was still walking on; went across Madison Square, crossed into Fifth Avenue, and was walking up. People were leaving their shops, going home, most of them hurrying as if the place they were going to, their home, held some pleasant surprise for them, something they had been waiting for the whole day, and were anxious to return and find it; and a few walked reluctantly, lingering in the streets, looking into the shop windows. These were evidently without real homes, and they wanted still to taste the largess of the street, of the open world, before closing themselves in their cubicles and shutting themselves from the world. These were people alone, all alone, who had nobody to go to; life had no surprises for them, no new complications. They knew what to expect, knew how their single rooms looked, knew what the evening would bring them, and were afraid of their certainty.

That was why he needed Gertrude Donovan. He did not want to be all alone. He wanted somebody with him, somebody who would share things with him, share the joys and the sorrows; somebody who

would encourage him and sympathize with him, who would live with him, really be a part of him.

He knew what he would do. Tomorrow he would find her address, go to her home, and take her with him. He was as certain that she would come as he was certain of anything. All he would have to do would be to stretch out his hand and say, Come, and she would come. He knew that. And then they would go into life together, go into real, livable life.

And he felt differently when he thought of that; he felt differently than he had ever felt before. Life was no more to him a succession of dinners and luncheons, of light love-making, of lukewarm prize-fights. No, it was a warm thing, a thing of troubles, of joys, real joys, earned joys, of sorrows, earned sorrows, a life consisting of work and of love, real work and real love.

And as he thought of that he was happy. Even the preoccupied look left his face and a look of peace came into it. He was a man; he knew what he would do; he knew what his life meant; he knew how to fight it.

He had subconsciously reached his home and let himself in with his latchkey. And then, somehow,

when he found himself in the old familiar surroundings, when he saw the hall of familiar colors, and the butler that he had known since childhood, when he had asked the butler whether his father was in, and when he was walking toward his father's study to announce to him the failure, he was not so sure as to what would happen tomorrow.

11

Mr. Zuckor and Goodman

Mr. Zuckor and Goodman came home together. Zuckor went at once to his room, while Goodman walked into the drawing-room. His wife and her mother were there. He said:

"Belle, the firm went bust today. Your father hasn't got a cent."

Bang!

Belle Goodman and her mother cried: "Oh!"

"It's a nice thing," continued Goodman, "to go bankrupt. A nice thing. At a time like this to fail."

A fine man, flashed through the mind of Mrs. Zuckor. A fine man. Take him up, make a man of him, give him your daughter, and then when the thing fails . . . A fine man.

"Where's Zuckor?" she asked.

"He went to his room," said Goodman, and went on: "God! Belle. It's a terrible thing. I didn't know what it was when I came in. A failure. God! What are we going to do?"

Mrs. Zuckor had hurried out of the room. Belle Goodman looked at her husband and said:

"He's got to get you out of this. He's got to do that. He's got to."

Belle Goodman was lying on the sofa, breathing with difficulty; her unborn child sticking through her dress interfered with her. Her unborn child. She loved it very much. Her first son. But now she was quite conscious that it interfered with her. It even interfered with her thinking. Because she knew that if the unborn child had not been there, she would not be doing what she was doing; she would not be taking her husband's side. If the unborn child had not been there, she would be with her father, who had done everything for them.

Goodman was standing before her looking at her. He was very uncomfortable. He did not know what to think. He just stood there looking at her.

And his wife, seeing him standing before her, despised him. She despised him because he was helpless; did not know what to do with himself; did not know which way to turn. She despised him because she had always suspected that if something like this should happen, things should fall through, her husband would fail her. And especially did she

despise him because she had been ugly and therefore not easily married, and she knew that that was why her father had picked Goodman out of the office and had made a man out of him: just to have a man to marry his daughter to. And although she knew she was not good-looking and therefore had not been easily married, still she felt herself superior to her husband, who had had nothing, and who would not have been picked out and made a decent man of if Zuckor had not had a daughter old enough and not good-looking enough to get married.

Belle Goodman was thinking these thoughts, looking at her husband. So to impress her, he tightened his fists and bit his lips and shouted:

"What are we going to do? I ask you, what are we going to do?"

Mrs. Zuckor found her husband sitting on a chair in his room looking at the photograph of his father. The photograph hung on the wall framed under double glass, and the features of Zuckor's father could not easily be distinguished. Zuckor was looking at them. He did not look at her when she came in.

"Aleck," she asked, "is that right? The firm failed?"

"Yes," he said, without looking at her.

Mrs. Zuckor became frightened. When Goodman had first announced the news of the failure, she had thought only of him, of his ingratitude, and her next thoughts had been of her husband. She had not realized what had happened. Only now did she understand it. The firm had failed, and they were without a cent. Two old people without a cent.

"Aleck," she asked, "what are we going to do?"

Mr. Zuckor did not answer. He was still looking at the photograph. He did not look at it, but stared in its direction, his throat hard, his forehead set, with all of his strength trying not to think. He kept on staring into the photograph.

Mrs. Zuckor became terrified. What happened? She could not understand it. What was it? A failure? What was that? How could they fail? What . . .

"Aleck," she cried, "what is it? What happened? Aleck!"

Mr. Zuckor did not answer.

Goodman was in the dining room, his back against the wall, watching the maid as she set the table. He

was watching her very carefully. She first placed a felt mat on the table, then the linen spread, put down the cutlery, forks first on the left, then the knives. He was watching her.

"All right, they failed. All right, they failed," he was saying to himself. "All right, they failed. What have I got to do with it? What? Did I cause the failure, or was it Read? Did I get anything out of it?"

Somehow or other he felt uncomfortable, felt ill at ease, out of place in this house that he had married into. He felt like a stranger. It had been good while all went well, but now that things had gone wrong he was an outsider, a man who didn't belong there.

And he felt sorry for himself. He felt sorry because the dream was over, the life that he had never expected and that had come to him as a joyful surprise, as a dream that came true, was over. The comforts, the joys of a comfortable home had disappeared, and he saw a picture of himself under the same conditions as when Zuckor had first met him. Again a clerk, again a minor employee, not the son-in-law of one of the partners, who could work or stop work at will without feeling that suddenly his job could be taken away from him and he

should find himself drifting. No, from now on he would have to work, work doubly hard. He had a wife, and his wife would soon have a child.

And he began to feel that Zuckor, instead of having helped him, had really harmed him. Had created for him a fool's paradise, a place where he did not need to think, all the thinking was done for him, and did not need to work, all the work was done for him. A place from which he could not see the hardships and the struggle of life, where he had been secure, even blind.

And he began to pity himself. Why? Why had all this happened now? Why? Without any warning everything had fallen on his head. What had he done to earn this? Why did he have to bear it all?

And Zuckor and his wife would have to be supported. They could not be left on the street. They would have to be fed and clothed, and a roof for them would have to be found. Four people on his shoulders. Suddenly, four people on his shoulders.

And as he was thinking that, watching the maid as she finished setting the table, he knew he would do it. He knew he would do it, because he would have to do it. There was no way out of it. He did not consciously say to himself: "I am going to do

it because I have to do it." No, but the feeling slowly crept on him. Slowly he saw himself working, the head of the family, responsible for the well-being of the others. Slowly he saw himself the head of the household.

And as he thought that he began to be proud. Yes, he would have to work, he would have to struggle, but then he would be the head. The orders would come from him, not from Zuckor. He would not feel any more that he was there by courtesy only or as a convenience. No, he would be a necessity, a being absolutely necessary, essential; and they would have to do what he wished and live the way he wanted them to live.

These were his thoughts as he stood leaning against the wall in the dining room, watching the maid as she prepared the table for dinner, and waiting for the others to join him.

They came in one by one. First Mrs. Zuckor, busying herself with the dinner, came in and went out again several times. Then Belle came in, said not a word to her husband, but with difficulty sat down at a chair that had been pushed away from the table. She looked very uncomfortable, even

ludicrous as she sat there, her enormous belly sticking in front of her, her face puffy and oily, and her eyes down.

Then when he and his mother-in-law had also sat down and the maid had brought in the first dish, Zuckor came in. He came in old-looking and tired-looking. The lines on his face were deeper than they had been on the evening before. He looked very tired and very old, and he nearly stooped as he approached the table and pulled a chair out.

They all began to eat with great preoccupation, afraid to look at one another, afraid that if the others saw their faces, they would be able to read their thoughts; and they were ashamed of their thoughts; they did not want the others to know them. So they masked their faces, looked down, and ate with great industry.

They kept on eating, and as slowly their stomachs were filling with food, they began to think less hard thoughts. Eating good food, cooked well, they couldn't keep on hating one another or despairing about the future. The future began to seem further away, less ominous, less portentous of bad things. When they had the food in their stomachs, they couldn't help feeling better and less bitter.

And slowly they realized that they were sitting around one common table, that they had sat at this table before, and that they had enjoyed it. They wanted to keep on sitting together at this table. They wanted to be all together, stay together, live together. The common table and the food they were eating made them feel closer to one another, softer toward one another. Zuckor no more felt that he was a lost man, that he could not do another thing, that life had stopped for him. No, he was eating, he was eating well, and things could not be as bad as they seemed. Mrs. Zuckor was occupied with serving, with carving, with seeing that every one was fed right. She had not lost her job of making life for the others comfortable. She was now working. Belle Goodman was thinking of her baby, was thinking how uncomfortable she felt, how wonderful it would be when she would finally give birth and feel light and belonging to herself. While Goodman . . . sitting at the table, he pictured to himself how it would all look when he would be working, when he would be bringing into the household. He saw himself the head of the home and somehow . . . even was glad that the office had failed and had given him a chance to assert himself.

These thoughts of theirs came slowly, so slowly that they did not realize them themselves, that when the dinner was over and the maid had taken away the last dishes and left the spread empty but for a few crumbs, they did not know that now they were different than they had been before, that now they felt closer to one another, bound in one another, absolutely essential to one another. That from now on they would fight with all of their strength to stay with one another. They did not realize that, because these thoughts had come slowly, had come with the food as it had slowly penetrated into their bodies and spread good feeling through them. When they rose from the table, apparently they looked no different than they had looked before; their faces were the same, even the expressions on their faces were no different than they had been before. Because they did not dare to admit to themselves and if they did they did not dare to show to the others that the thing was over, that the tragedy had passed, and that life had begun again. Goodman did not dare to announce as yet that tomorrow he would become the head of the household, that he would work, would begin to bring into it things necessary for the household's existence. He knew it already, but

he didn't dare to say it. And it was doubtful whether he would say it that evening. It was more probable that tomorrow he would simply get up, go out, and find something. Zuckor did not know as yet how things would be saved. He knew they would be, had a feeling of absolute certainty that they would, but he did not know as yet how. So he did not dare to talk about it or even show to the other that he felt it. Mrs. Zuckor simply did not have the imagination to conceive of anything bad. When she had seen her husband sitting on a chair in his room and staring at his father's photograph, she had become terrified because her husband had never done a thing like that before. But now that he was doing what he always did, now that his gestures were the usual ones, she quieted down and thought of nothing, simply mentally did not exist. And Belle Goodman . . . she was to be a mother soon. Her thoughts were of two kinds: her child, and what she would do with it, and the wonderful feeling it would be when she would once more be free of it.

Here was a household that like a million others had begun years ago as a small thing. Two people had gone into life together, not much thinking about

it, not much worried over it, since they were not thinking about it. Had gone into it with the confidence people have that life will not fail them; with the idea that they wanted a home, a place where they could stay, could rest, could really call a part of themselves. Zuckor had worked, had brought into the household; his wife had stayed home, made the place comfortable, livable.

Things had happened, a son had been born, a daughter; Zuckor had advanced, had improved his position; the home was enlarged. More things had happened, the son had died. The shock had been terrible, but the home had gone on. There was always this point around which they turned, this central idea that they lived for. It was always the home. All things good and bad were always judged by their effect on it. Zuckor had been promoted, the home could be enlarged, Zuckor had lost a position and needed to look for another one, the home had to be reduced. A great sorrow came, the home mourned. A great joy, the home celebrated.

Things had gone on. Zuckor and his wife were older; the daughter had grown up, had married, was even expecting a child of her own. Zuckor had prospered, had made a success of work. The home

was large, comfortable. It was no more a sorrow for them, no more a thing that they suffered for, but a place of great joy. They lived in it, and rested in it. It was their own work; and now for their old age they could have a place which they themselves had made, in which they could finish their time peacefully.

And then the thing had happened. The failure. It had happened, had swept them off their feet. Home, future, comfort, were suddenly swept from them. And they saw nothing before them. No good or evil. Simply nothing.

That was why they had all appeared mad, one crying to the other: "What are we going to do?" The other not answering, not thinking, trying to be as dead as possible. That was why in this single afternoon they had all aged years.

But things don't stop. Life doesn't stop. An office failed. An office failed and left some people destitute, without any hopes. But life doesn't stop. Things must go on. There must be a tomorrow. Tomorrow must consist of something. People cannot say: "Things have all fallen through; life has stopped for us; we will not live any longer." Peo-

ple don't die because an office has failed. People don't disappear when an awful calamity overtakes them. People must live on. There is always a tomorrow. And the tomorrow after that. And tomorrow must consist of something. It must be something.

These four had had to find some way of getting out of the rut they were in and going on. They had to live on. On this afternoon after the office failed they had had to find some way of having a tomorrow, a tomorrow filled with life, filled with hope, filled with little joys and with little sorrows. There was no way out of it. They had to do it. They could not sit with their hands folded and despair. Something had to be created in them, some new combination that would present life to them, life in all its forms, with its hopes, its expectations, its disappointments. The thing had to happen.

And it did. Things went right on. They went right on. It was not important that the particular problem of this family was saved in this particular sort of way. If the family had been different, if the problem had been different, it would have been saved in some other way. Life had to go on.

12

Edward Foley

Maybe he'd feel better if he got a drink. Maybe he'd know what to do.

But then if he got a drink, he'd take another one, and then more; and then there would be double hell to pay. He'd be drunk, and he'd be . . . out of a job.

He stood undecisively under the Elevated poles on Greenwich Street hearing the trains roar above him, and he looked thoughtfully at the ice-cream parlor, in the cellar of which he knew he could get a drink. And he knew that in the cellar there would be many friends of his who would advise him what to do.

The thing to do was to get a drink.

Yes. A drink.

Wife . . . he forced her out of his mind, he threw her out of his mind, and went in.

"Hello," he said to the soda clerk. The soda clerk said: "Hello."

"Anybody downstairs?" he asked.

"Yes, there's a crowd."

He went downstairs.

"Hello, Eddie," somebody cried. "Want a drink?"

He did, and he got it. The whisky was slow and hot, and it poured down his throat easily. It didn't stop, as it did sometimes, and make him choke. No, it poured down as easy as anything.

He felt better. He forgot what he went in for and had another drink.

Henry came over. "Hello, Eddie. What's new?"

There was something new. He knew there was. But he couldn't remember it. What the devil was it? Something about his wife?

"Have a drink?" asked Henry. He didn't care if he did.

This had been the third, and he felt good. He had courage, and felt good, good as hell. He ought to go out now. Home.

He was ready to go home. He paid his, and was ready to go out.

"I hear your house's on the bum."

Christ, yes. That was it.

"Yes," he said. "It failed. They took the ticker out today."

"You're out of luck," somebody said. "Tough luck. What're you going to do?"

"Got to tell the Missus," Eddie said.

"Jesus," somebody yelled. Somebody else laughed.

"A drink," cried Eddie.

This had been the fourth. He always remembered how many drinks he had had. He could bet that he'd remember. He could take ten and he'd know.

" . . . They're all going now," somebody whose voice he did not know was saying. "They're all going, one after another. There's a clean-up. The District Attorney's after them. The papers opened up a campaign. And when the papers're against something, it can't last."

"Yes, the papers," Eddie said. "Bucket shops. Campaign."

He felt that this man who was telling them all about it didn't know anything, while he, Edward Foley, he had been working on the Street. He knew all about it. Where did this guy get off telling them? It was his business. He had been on the Street.

"It's this way," he began in a loud voice. "Those

guys want too much. They want to get everything."

"Yes," somebody said. "Everything. They get everything. Those capitalists."

"Capitalists! Hear the guy. He's a socialist."

"Can the socialism. See!"

Of course there was the wife. Of course there was the wife. The wife was there, and he couldn't do anything about it. The wife was there sooner or later.

He'd better go home. Go home . . . or— Home. Christ, no!

"A drink." He got it.

The discussion was now divided between two groups. There was the socialist. A little crowd around him. Mostly kidding him. Hear the guy. He's a socialist. Socialist? They ought to hang those guys. Raping women. Russia. And then there was the other group around the fellow who knew all about it. He was telling them about the District Attorney.

"There's a blank warrant," he was saying. "All he's got to do is fill your name in it, and you're in for it."

Eddie stood there alone, a little bit of whisky in his glass. He looked wistfully at the two groups. He knew all about it. He had been there. He had worked there. Where did those guys get the stuff? He was going to tell them.

"It's not like that," he proclaimed. "It's like this. The Stock Exchange. . . ."

But this was his fifth glass, and all he had been on Wall Street was a porter. Dust the desks, send out mail, and sign receipts. But he had been on the Street. He had been on the Street. He must know all about it.

"Jim Stubb doesn't like them," was saying the fellow who knew all about it. "And when the big Boss doesn't like them, they go like that" (he brushed a speck off his coat). "Like that. If Fourteenth Street don't like them, they can't last."

It was very lucky for him that he finally had somebody to listen to him. A little old fellow stood near the bar, an empty glass in front of him. Eddie turned to him and excitedly said:

"It's like this: They work and they work, and then they do something crooked, and the Stock Exchange sends a man up to take the ticker away. Then the game's up. They've got to quit."

"Wanna buy me a drink?" asked the little old fellow.

He did, and the little old fellow kept on listening to him while sipping his whisky. Eddie became excited. Was telling in a loud voice his opinions of the Exchange, of the financial market, of the firm he had worked in. Was giving his opinions in a loud, sure voice: "It's like this, and it's like that. See?" And the people in the other groups heard him, and heard that he was talking in a loud sure voice. So they became interested, left their speaker and moved toward him. He kept on talking; as he noticed the crowd forming about him, his voice became louder and surer. He was not giving his opinions any more; he was telling them. "It's like this, see? It's like that, see? See? I know what I'm talking about. I work there."

He became more and more excited, had two or three more drinks. He couldn't remember whether it had been two or three. Became conscious of the fact that he could not remember whether it had been two or three. Felt ashamed; was afraid somebody would ask him how many drinks he had had, and he wouldn't be able to say. So he talked louder and louder.

"They can't fool the Exchange. Those guys know all about it. They know all there is to know. A guy was telling me yesterday, if you split commissions, they send a man up, and he takes your ticker away. And do you know what happens if they take your ticker away?"

He stopped.

"Do *you* know what happens if they take your ticker away? . . .

"You're on the bum. See!"

The crowd was thinning out. Soon there was nobody but the proprietor, himself, and the little old man left. He kept on talking. But the proprietor didn't listen to him, and the little old fellow looked sleepy. So he stopped short. He didn't know what to do with himself; didn't know what it had all been about. Didn't remember what he was to do. He just stood there looking around him.

The proprietor walked over.

"You'd better go home and tell your wife."

His wife. Christ, yes. That was the thing to do. The failure.

He walked up; said, "So long," to the soda clerk; the soda clerk said: "So long." He went out. It was dark. The lamps were lit. Above from time to

time the Elevated train rushed by. He stood reflectively for a moment. Then went to the L station.

He didn't remember anything that happened in the train. To get some cool breeze he had stood on the platform. People had pushed him as they were going in and out. Then automatically he got off.

Now he was going home. He was going home to his wife. Supper and his wife. He was to tell his wife about the failure. The firm had failed, and he was out of a job. That was it. Yes. He was to tell his wife that tomorrow he would look for another job. He was feeling sleepy.

On his corner a man standing in a doorway said hello. Eddie didn't answer. He was too busy fighting sleep. He knew somewhere far back that he shouldn't feel sleepy because he was to go home and tell his wife of the failure. The failure. He didn't say hello to the man standing in the doorway because he didn't care to. See?

He walked on. There were many people on the sidewalk. Too many people on the sidewalk. It must be a holiday, he thought. So many people on the sidewalk he couldn't walk straight. Had to

walk around them. They wouldn't get out of his way, so he walked around them.

The thing to do was to go in and tell his wife that the firm had failed. Tell her the firm had failed. "Mary, the firm has failed." That was it. "Mary, the firm has failed." He repeated it a few times aloud to hear what it would sound like. "Mary, the firm has failed." That was all right.

And then sleep. He would have to go to sleep. Sleep was a damned good thing. You forget everything. You forget the firm has failed, and your wife, and that you've got to tell her, and that you're due for a bawling out.

Christ, that was it. He was drunk. Now he knew it. He knew he was drunk, and his wife would give him hell. Double hell. He was drunk, and he was out of a job.

He had to get sober. Although he was drunk, he knew that he had to get sober. Had to be able to walk home, walk into the house straight, and say: "Mary, the firm has failed." But he knew he was drunk. He knew he wouldn't be able to say it. He knew his wife would find out he was drunk. And then, hell!

He walked up the steps. One after another,

slowly, saying to himself: "I've got to get sober. I've got to get sober. There's nothing to do about it. I've got to get sober." But he wasn't sure. Somehow he wasn't sure. He knew he wanted to get sober and he couldn't.

And he was frightened. The nearer he approached to his floor the more frightened he became. He was drunk. Oh, hell! Why? Why was he drunk? Why tonight? Why the hell was he drunk? There was his wife. She was waiting for him.

Stretching himself tight, pulling the hat over his head, he reached his door and opened it.

13

Miss James

"The poor boobs," Miss James thought, "the way they call up. Is this Glymmer, Read and Company? Is this Glymmer, Read and Company?" Anxiously. Worrying. "Is this Glymmer, Read and Company? Is Mr. Read in? Is Mr. Kranz in?" Worrying stiff.

"Right. Hello. This is Glymmer, Read and Company. No. Mr. Read is not in. He left. He left for the West or for Europe or anywhere else you God damn please. No, he's not in. Oh, Lord!"

She sat there at the telephone switchboard expertly removing the wires and plugging them. Before her little lights flashed and disappeared. A buzzing. "Hello. This is Glymmer, Read and Company. No, he's out. Right."

Everybody out. Everybody gone. Orders said, everybody gone. Read had come into her room and had said: "Miss James, from now on everybody's out." She was obeying orders. "No, he's not in.

No, he's not in. Can't you understand what I said? He's not in."

The old tone of courtesy was gone. No smile about this voice. The people calling were not customers any more whom you had to please. No, they were annoyances. Everybody calling up, in town or out of town. A firm had failed; everybody worried.

Her fingers were flying over the switchboard automatically. Her voice was also automatically unconscious, usually not knowing what she was saying. Her whole body machinelike as a result of years at the switchboard. Her body busy, and her mind free.

Why the devil should she be lying to these people? What was she getting out of it? What would she gain? Dearie, you're out of a job. Go look for another one. Why should she lie?

Read was in the office locked up. Don't want to see anybody. Steal their money, and don't want to see anybody. Hire people, make them lose their jobs, and don't want to see any one.

But she knew very well that she would go on saying: "No, Mr. Read is not in. No, he's not in. No, I don't know when he will be back." And she was irritated because she knew she should tell these peo-

ple: "Yes. Read's in. Yes, he's here. Come down and see him." Still she continued saying what she had been ordered to say. She knew her business. She was a telephone girl, and that was all there was to it.

Of all the people in the office she knew most about what went on there, and was the least interested in the things that happened. A great affair might have been on, and the whole of the office might have breathlessly watched Read as he tried to put the deal through the telephone, begging, explaining, arguing. Everybody in the office might have interested himself in the results but she. She cared least. She was as efficient as ever, as quickly as ever connected Read with whomever he wanted to be connected, but after all no quicker than if she were ringing up some girl friend for one of the younger clerks in the office who wanted to go out that night. Miss James was only the connector. She was only a part of the telephone system installed by the telephone company, a human part, because a human part was necessary. But that was all. When Zuckor thought of the office force, his thought never included Miss James. There were clerks in the office who saw Miss James so rarely

that they never thought of her as one of them, but when rarely she would come into the general office, they asked who she was. All day long she sat in her cubicle before the switchboard, connecting, disconnecting, ringing, calling. All of them knew her voice, knew every inflection in it, knew whether she was in a pleasant mood or feeling disagreeable, whether things with her were going well or not well; they knew everything about her through her voice. But her figure they did not know. And she too might have met one of them on the street and might never have greeted him. She did not know how they looked. But by their voices she knew them all, knew who was who, even when a new clerk was hired, and she heard a new voice, she knew how much experience the newcomer had in business, and the importance of his position by the glibness of his tongue, by the confidence in his voice. Just as a blind person can tell the character of who speaks to him through the subtlest shades of the speaker's voice, so Miss James could construct for herself the image of a person when she heard him. In that office she was doubly blind: she never saw and was never seen. All things to her were voices and to all she too was only a voice.

She sat there in her cubicle before the telephone switchboard, answering calls, protecting the office in this unsure moment from the outside world, shooing away people who might annoy the men in the office to whom an awful thing had happened, the office had failed, and who were trying to adjust themselves to the situation, who did not want to hear the pitiful cries of people who had lost money, who did not want to be affected by the complaints. She was doing it because she had been ordered to do so, not because she wanted to do it. Inside of herself she did not want to do it. She wanted to leave the office, go out somewhere into the open air, where she would not need to protect anybody from anything. But she stayed there because she was a telephone girl. She had been trained to stay in her cubicle and to listen to the voices calling, whatever happened. And she was doing it.

She recognized one after another the voices of the different clients as they called up the office, the influential men who called up in a leisurely tone trying to hide from her the fact that they were anxious, but who could not fool her, since from long training at the switchboard she had learned to tell the slightest quaver in a voice that was trying to

sound calm, but that was really excited; then other men called up, men who were but small traders, who did not amount to much, but who really were touched by this failure, who had lost all of their savings or the future of whose business had been seriously jeopardized. These men did not at all want to hide from anybody the fact that the failure meant everything to them, and they shouted into her ears quick words, sometimes totally unintelligible, words whose meaning she got more through the inflection than through the words themselves. And as the afternoon wore on and she answered more and more of these voices, telling them Read was not in, that she did not know where he was, that she was not responsible for this (some of them in their excitement began to blame her for the whole affair), the whole thing got more and more on her brain, till she felt sick of it, and wanted to shut out the receiver and stop listening to those crazy voices. And she became more and more excited, shouting at these people, yelling at them, abusing them. Her disgust of Read was vented on these people who were calling up, and who also had suffered because of him.

The cubicle had been made soundproof so that

the telephone operator should not be annoyed by stray noises from the general office, and even in quiet moments between calls she heard nothing. But she imagined that some of the people she had told that Read was not in the office had not believed her and had come down anyway. And she tried to picture to herself the scenes that were now passing inside. She hoped that some client would get together enough courage to create a real row, even possibly begin to fight, punch Read or Glymmer in the jaw. It would show them, the dirty pigs: robbing people like that; making people lose their jobs. She tried to picture to herself how Read would look beaten up, or how Glymmer with his big body all battered up: Glymmer who looked like a saint.

Then people began calling up again, crying in excited voices, "Is this Glymmer, Read and Company?" "Is this Glymmer, Read and Company?" "Mr. Read in?" "Mr. Glymmer in?" "I must speak to him. Look here, I must speak to him. I must."

Again she was obeying her orders, saying: "No, he's not in. No, I tell you he's not in. Can't you understand English? Look here, don't you swear at me. I'll tell you where to get off."

And whenever a man calling became too insolent, she would add under her breath, after she had shut him off: "I'm glad of it. A guy like that ought to get his money taken away from him."

And all the time she was plugging, connecting, disconnecting, ringing, calling, notifying. All of the time busy. Her fingers flying in all directions. Inside the office was all topsy-turvy, the whole machine standing on its head, nothing was functioning that had been functioning before. The only one in the office who was working was Miss James, only instead of connecting anxious salesmen with buyers, or the traders with other firms or with the Exchange, now she was a dead wall between the office and the outside wall. Calls could go out, but they could not come in.

Then Read asked for a wire, and she wanted not to give it to him. She wanted for once to assert her independence and not to give it to him. Let him run into her room, and she'd show it to him. She'd give him hell. Who was he to yell at her? She'd tell him. But after all she did give him the connection, herself saying, "No, I won't give it to him," and her fingers connecting him with central. She was helping Read all of the time, doing for him

everything she knew he would want her to do. And under her breath she hated him. Under her breath she was against him. But she was not allowed to have a breath. She had nothing to lose if she revolted. Her job was gone. Tomorrow she would have to look for another one. This job was finished. She could walk right out, and nobody had anything to say to her. But she didn't. She stayed right where she was. She kept on operating the switchboard.

Once she did shut it off and went to Gerty Donovan's room in the general office. Gerty looked awfully helpless before her typewriter, all mixed up and not knowing what she would do, and Miss James pitying her told her where she might look for a job.

"Theatrical office," she said, "twenty-two a week, and you don't get killed like here on the Street."

"I don't know," Gerty answered, "the manager would want you to do all kinds of things for the job."

"What's the difference?" Miss James said. "Twenty-two a week. Me for money. If I could take shorthand."

Then Mr. Zuckor appeared and said:

"Miss James, you don't belong here. Why don't you go back to the telephone room?"

Miss James flared up.

"I don't have to take any orders from you, Mr. Zuckor. Why don't you pay your wages?"

She flounced out of the room. She was very angry. Where did he get that stuff? Ordering her about. Who the devil was he?

She went back to her cubicle, sat down at the switchboard, opened the key. Little lights. "Is this Glymmer, Read and Company?" "Is this Glymmer, Read and Company?"

Again she became the telephone girl. Again she was protecting the firm from annoying people. Again the voices came, crying, anxious, despairing, "Mr. Read in?" "Mr. Kranz in? I must speak to him." Again she began very cool, and then worked herself up into a heat of temper. Her retorts again became sharp, cutting, insulting. She was working again.

And all the while she was working she was sick of it. She wanted to get away from it, to get away from it all. What was she waiting for? Why didn't

she get out? What was she doing here? What could she expect? Why didn't she get out? Oh! Lord.

"Is Mr. Read in?" "Is Mr. Read in?" "No, I tell you Mr. Read is not in." "But I must speak to him. I must. Do you understand? I must speak to him. It's very important. It's terribly important. Oh! Miss, I must speak to him."

"He's not in. No, he's not in. I tell you he's not in. God! Can't you understand? Look here, who do you think you're talking to? Where do you get that stuff?"

She was working quickly, her fingers plugging and unplugging. The plugs making little squeezing noises. Buzzing. Little lights. White lights. Little white balls appeared. Miss James was working.

She was working quickly, unconsciously, and became aware that she was working unconsciously, that her brain was not interested in what she was doing. That her mind was free to think, to reason as to what she was doing. And she wanted to bury herself in the work. She tried to work with her head, to think what she was saying; she tried to.

But then she became more excited. The thing began to bother her. She began to feel that what she was saying was a lie, that she had no reason to lie. There was no good in it for her. And her hands became unwilling to do what she was forcing them to do. If she didn't think about it, the plugging and the unplugging came naturally to her, even the words came into her mouth without thinking about it. But when she was thinking about what she was doing, she couldn't make her hands obey her. So she stopped thinking about her work, stopped thinking about anything, and worked.

Then she was called in to receive her pay, the office force was all gone; hardly anybody remained in the office but Zuckor, who sat at his desk. He looked tired and old; and as she came over to his desk and signed the receipt, she was sorry she had been insolent toward him, she had not realized what the failure had meant to him. But she did not show it in her look, she did not say thank you; she signed the receipt and walked stiffly back to the telephone room.

Calls came rarely now. Only occasionally did a white light flash. The news must have reached

everywhere; the evening papers must have come out, and everybody knew about the failure. The office too was empty, nobody answered it. The office was finished. The work was finished. Miss James put on her hat and walked out.

14

Mr. Read

Hotel lobby. Tall, high, great, tremendous hall. Palms. Orchestra playing. Soft lights falling on everything. A circle. Chairs around. Soft, languorous chairs. Chairs so soft that when you sit in them, you feel falling way down somewhere below. Soft, nice chairs. Little tables. Brass ash trays. Soft, yielding carpets.

A woman across from him sitting low in a soft chair. A black satin dress that promised heaven, and below, crossed high, legs. Beautiful legs. A look, soft yet self-respecting. You might try to talk to me, but don't be too sure of your welcome. I might become insulted. Call for the manager. Start a racket. And then again I might not. I might raise my eyes, rest them on yours, and say: "Yes, you may sit down." The kind of woman for whom kingdoms fall. A marvelous woman. God, what a woman! Smacking your lips, talking about her to your friends afterwards.

He was sitting in a soft chair looking at the marvelous woman, waiting for the two men to come and join him. A conference. An important conference. Talking of the advisability of beginning a new brokerage house. A new brokerage house. Read's office had failed. He had nothing to do. We must have a new brokerage house.

He had shaved, had had his shoes shined, had even bought himself a new soft collar which he had changed in the wash room. Was all ready to meet the two men and to talk about the new office. We must have a new office.

The old office has failed. "Good-by, old office. We must have a new office. The office is dead. Long live the office."

He was very satisfied with himself. Here he was sitting in this hotel lobby looking at the marvelous woman opposite him. The questionable woman. There was a question whether she would scream if he tried to talk to her. And then again she mightn't. She might say: "Yes, you may talk to me." And then . . .

Wouldn't it be nice?

Tonight he would have to be very forceful, very direct. Would have to prove to the other two men

that a new office was really necessary. That a new office was indispensable. That a new office was essential.

And that he was the ideal man to run an office like that. That all through the length and breadth of the United States there was not a single man who could run an office better than he, Read, could do it. He had to prove that.

He would have to be very careful. No cheap gestures. No stage work. It would have to be done very quietly. Very carefully. Like an undertaker when he is called into a bereaved home. I am very sorry. Please, won't you *just* show me where he lies?

It was wonderful to feel the strength in you to go right on. To feel strong enough to keep right on building. An office has failed. What of that? We start a new office. Where one falls the other rises.

An office has failed. But when you run an office you mustn't put everything into it. All of your strength, all of your power, all of your prospects. Because if it fails you must be able to pick out of stray corners new prospects, new hopes. You must be able to wait in a hotel lobby for some men who will help you build a new office.

A bellboy was calling: "Mr. Deed! Mr. Deed! Mr. Deed!"

Maybe it was they. Maybe they were here. They had come. He dried his hand in his pocket on the handkerchief so he would be ready to shake, and rose.

"Here."

No, it was not he. It was a Mr. Deed. He would have to wait awhile. He sat down again. Lit a cigarette. Looked at the woman. Marvelous. When the next office succeeds he would have to get a woman like that. Must be frightfully expensive. But will have to get one like that. Beautiful.

The man she must be waiting for. A strong, big person. A successful person. A person who does not have any more to wait for men in hotel lobbies. They come to him. They come into his office and beg: "Please, I'd like to . . ."

But then he would be like that some day. Men would also come to him and say: "Please, I'd like to." He would be successful like that man the marvelous woman was waiting for.

The appointment was for nine o'clock. He looked at his watch. It was eight-thirty. Another half an

hour. Another half an hour waiting for the two men to come and join him to talk over with him the advisability of opening a new office. A half an hour. In that half an hour he would have to pull his wits together. Would have to decide which way he would talk, how he would try to convince the other two men; the way to make them, after he was through talking, stand up, put their hands out, and say: "Mr. Read, we are with you. We are with you to the end."

Yes, that was what they would have to say. They would have to be absolutely enthusiastic, would have to be anxious to start a new office, would have to want to start a new office. "Mr. Read, we must start a new office, and you must run it." That was it.

It would have to appear as if he were doing them a favor by starting an office for them. As if he wanted to do a million and one other things, but since they asked him, he would do it for them. He didn't want to start it, but they asked him to, so he would do it.

It would have to appear as if it were they who asked him to do it, not he. He was just about sick and tired of scenes. He didn't want to happen

again what had happened this afternoon. He didn't want scenes. "Look what you've done: You've ruined me; you've made a beggar out of me, impoverished me." He didn't want that.

He wanted to build a new office. He wanted to start a new business. A new business that would take its own chances. When the thing went broke he didn't want everybody to come after him crying: "Look what you've done. You've brought this on us. We are ruined, and it's all your fault."

He wanted men to go in and take a chance the way he was taking chances.

People sitting around talking, quietly, in undertones. "The very best ribbon. The very best. I know what I am talking about. In the business thirty years. The very best. And cheap!"

"You must take care of your wife and children. Man alive. You must do that. Just think. A taxi runs over you. You're in the hospital. Wife and children? Starving. On the streets. Man, think!

"A life policy. Anything can happen to you and you don't care."

All around him men trying to get ahead. Men

forging ahead. Using all of their wits, all of their powers. Building. Building. Creating new things. Selling. Buying. Exchanging.

And so was he. So was he. He was trying to build too. He also was working.

What if it failed? Other things fail. A man may be down, but he's never out. And he wasn't even down. Wasn't he waiting for the two men to join him for the conference? Wasn't he going to build a new office? Start things again?

Anyway, damn Glymmer. And damn Zuckor. Two old men. They had to get out of the way. Too old. Make room for new blood. Fresh blood. Young energy.

And why weren't they like he? Why didn't they put things away? Why didn't they provide against failure? A life policy. Anything can happen and you don't care.

God, if he'd be sentimental, if he'd begin thinking about what would happen every time he took a step, he'd be afraid to move.

We can't do that. We must get ahead. Forge ahead.

And the next office would be larger. Would employ more people. Create more work. More peo-

ple would be employed. More people would be taken care of.

Why, he was actually doing good work. Enlarging things. Making things bigger. Cutting out the dry wood and selecting fresh, strong timber.

He looked again at his watch. A quarter to nine. Another fifteen minutes. In another fifteen minutes he would begin things again. Would start building again.

After all a man like him couldn't get lost. Couldn't starve or suffer. Energy. Strength. Determination. Do or die.

Look at all the beggars on the streets. No energy. No determination. Simply drifting. Simply existing.

You must plan, must work, must fight. Things don't come of their own accord. You must fight for them. Must struggle for them.

And if you do, if you fight hard enough, you can't fail. Things must come your way.

There were the people in the old office. He could pick out the ones who would get ahead immediately. The ones who would fight, who wouldn't be held back by anything. At once he could tell them, the ones who would get ahead.

And the others didn't matter. They were driftwood. From one office to another. From one job to another. Bookkeepers. Stenographers. Clerks. Once a clerk always a clerk. That was their motto.

And if they didn't help themselves, if they didn't fight for themselves, why should any one fight for them? Who was going to fight their battles for them?

He lit another cigarette. Looked at the woman opposite. Tried to catch her eye. Didn't succeed. Looked around him, at the people in the circle, and the bellboys running around calling out names.

It *was* good. To be able to sit in this circle, on this soft chair, among successful, respected people. It was good, there was no getting away from that. To lean your head against the back of the chair and watch the shaded lights above you through the smoke of your cigarette. Your head full of figures, of plans, of combinations. Your bill folder full. You could look as if you didn't care about anything.

Or look below you and see your own well-creased trousers, well-shined shoes, sinking into the deep carpet. Occasionally flick some ashes on the carpet.

Why, if you didn't look successful, if you didn't

look like a man getting ahead, they would tell you to leave the hotel immediately.

But as it was they didn't dare. They wouldn't dare to talk to a man who looked important. A man who looks important can throw ashes on a hotel carpet and nobody dares say a word.

Nine o'clock approaching. Of course there would be a little unpleasantness. Bankruptcy proceedings. Lawyers. Judges. But it had to be gone through. You can't expect to get ahead if you want all pleasure.

But then he would be given a clean bill of health. A discharged bankrupt! What of that? He'd like to know how many successful men hadn't gone through bankruptcy at least once in their careers? He might almost say it was expected of them.

And then they started a new office, paid their new bills, and became respected and looked up to.

That was the way.

The man who came up to the woman opposite disappointed him slightly. He was short and stocky and didn't look successful. He wondered that a woman like her went around with a man like that.

She was so distinguished and so rich-looking, and he looked worn.

As she rose he tried to catch her eye. Looked her straight in the face. Nothing to be afraid of from a man like that. Why, he'd tell him.

God, what a woman! For a woman like that he'd do anything. Anything in the world. To have a woman like that look at him, smile at him, be his, he . . .

"Mr. Read! Call for Mr. Read! Mr. Read!"

He started, then, forgetting the woman, rose.

"Here."

And he walked in the direction of the bellboy.

A new office was beginning.

THE END

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ooks of

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WITHDRAWN